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MANX SPEAKERS, LANGUAGE, AND IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

Manx, the Goidelic language of the Isle of Man, has no extant traditional native speakers. However, thanks to the efforts of language activists and others involved in language revival, there exists a community of around 2200 people who claim competence in the language (Isle of Man Government 2021), of which a smaller portion will have advanced competence in Manx. All members of the Manx speaker community could be described as 'new speakers', having acquired this revitalized minority language primarily through means other than first language transmission in the home (O'Rourke, Pujolar, and Ramallo 2015: 1).

The members of the Manx new speaker community, despite many having acquired "a socially and communicatively consequential level of competence" (Jaffe 2015: 25) in the traditional language of the Isle of Man, vary in terms of their national, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. Postmodern approaches to sociolinguistics challenge the assumption of a straightforward link between identity, especially national identity, and linguistic practice. The complexity of the relationship between language and identity is especially evident in cases of multilingual minority language communities – such as the extant Celtic-speaking communities.

The present paper explores the relationship between identity and language use among Manx new speakers. It discusses the following specific question: How do new speakers of Manx understand and identify with 'Manxness'? The paper uses a corpus of sociolinguistic interview and ethnographic observation data gathered from fieldwork among the Manx new speaker community as part of the author's PhD thesis. The researcher, a Manx new speaker herself, spent six months gathering data, both through traditional sociolinguistic methods, such as interviews and questionnaires, and through ethnographic methods, namely participant observation in various contexts. The analysis of this novel spoken corpus offers a much-needed view into identity and language use in a 21st-century Celtic language community that lacks extant native speakers.

Keywords: Manx, identity, new speakers, Manxness, cultural heritage, multilingualism

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1. An Introduction to Manx

Manx, or Manx Gaelic, is the autochthonous Goidelic Celtic language of the Isle of Man. Manx (*Gaelg* to its speakers) is one of the many minority languages across Europe, and elsewhere, that underwent linguistic obsolescence in the 19th and 20th centuries. This continued to such an extent that the traditional Manx speaker community lost its last speaker, Ned Maddrell, in 1974 (Stowell and Ó Bréasláin 1996). The exact 'end point' of the traditional variety of Manx is contentious (see discussion in Lewin 2016, 2021). However, it is likely that first language transmission of Manx had been disrupted much earlier than 1974, probably as early as the nineteenth century. That said, 1974 at least marks a definitive cease in Manx's transmission as a first language in the community. This was the ultimate conclusion of a long decline in speaker numbers, with speakers shifting to English as a result of trade, immigration, and cultural Anglicization (see Broderick et al. 1999, Clague 2009, Wilson et al. 2015 for further discussion).

However, the language had some degree of continuity in the community (Broderick et al. 1999, Lewin 2021) as it continued to be spoken as a second language. Today, Manx is heavily minoritized, classed as 'critically endangered' by UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger (Moseley 2010). Since the 1990s there have been marginal examples of acquisition of Manx by children in the home environment, however the vast majority of Manx speakers acquire the language through means other than first language transmission in the home.

In more recent times, the Manx language has seen a revival, which has had the effect of creating a community of new speakers of Manx. Over 2,200 people reported the ability to speak, read, or write Manx according to the latest Isle of Man census, taken in 2021 (Isle of Man Government 2022). As of 2010, it was estimated that around a hundred of these could be classed as "highly fluent" (Ó hIfearnáin 2015a: 54), though this has likely since increased (Ó hIfearnáin 2015b: 111). The growth in speaker numbers has been particularly noticeable among young speakers, with the number of 10-14-year-old Manx speakers having jumped from 64 to 340 from 1991 to 2001 (Clague 2009: 176). This figure is also likely greater 21 years on. However, as Clague (ibid.) notes, this is not necessarily indicative of the fluency or linguistic competence of these young speakers, nor of the frequency with which they use the language, especially in domains other than education (Wilson 2009: 25, Sallabank 2013: 219). This discrepancy remains a problem when evaluating the 'success' of language revitalization programmes.

2. The new speaker

The term 'new speakers' refers to minoritized language speakers who typically do not acquire the language through first language transmission in the home or

local community (O'Rourke and Walsh 2020: 18). Nevertheless, a new speaker will have acquired "a socially and communicatively consequential level of competence" in a minority language (Ramallo, O'Rourke, and Pujolar 2015, in Jaffe 2015: 25). Manx represents a currently atypical situation among European minoritized languages which is likely to become more common in the future; the present-day speaker community is entirely made up of new speakers, the majority of whom have had no direct contact with traditional native speakers.

It is the intent of this article to explore how such speakers relate to concepts of language and identity, using the Manx context as a case study. However, first it is necessary to discuss the nature of identity and its relation to language. The following sections begin with a theoretical discussion on the nature of identity as it relates to language use, then discusses how this functions in linguistic minority communities. The author then discusses existing literature on language and identity in the Manx context, followed by some preliminary findings from her own fieldwork.

3. Language and Identity

Identity is defined broadly by Jackson (2017: 1) as being one's sense or concept of self: "how you view yourself and your place or positioning in the world". A person's identity may be linked to what groups or communities they are (or are not) a member of, e.g. membership of a certain nation or language community. Language plays a key role in the construction, performance, maintenance, and experience of one's identity (McCooey-Heap 2020: 37); Omoniyi (2006: 14) states that "language and identity are inseparable". Understanding identity, and its relationship to language, is therefore key to understanding how language use functions within a given community.

Research into language and identity has presented varying views on the nature of identity, particularly linguistic identity. Certain more essentialist approaches to identity involve "labelling any number of normative characteristics or practices as constituting the core of an individual or group, which are then used to define them and held true of all members of the group" (Omoniyi 2006: 16). In other words, they maintain that there is some factor which can be used to define an individual or group, and which is constant across that group in all contexts. An example of such conceptions of language and identity comes from earlier studies in variationist sociolinguistics. Such studies explain linguistic differences in terms of gender and social class, with the conclusion that individuals speak the way they do because they are a member of some pre-existing group, such as 'women' or 'working class people'. According to this view, all members of these pre-determined groups can therefore be expected to speak in a similar way by dint of their being a member of that group.

As Martin-Rubio (2006: 680) notes, popular definitions and understandings of identity often bear resemblance to an essentialist view - they "imply that there is something that defines the individual or group" (their emphasis). Such views on identity can prove useful to the communities and individuals that espouse them, for example Bucholtz (2003: 401) states that "essentialism promotes shared in-group status by the imposition of assumed norms which provide a stable social environment". Essentialist conceptions of identity may also be employed by groups for political ends, in the form of "a deliberate forging of a common identity, perhaps as a base for social action" (ibid. 240). If a group, for example a group of minority language speakers, names and defines itself, its members are in a much better position to advocate for themselves. This kind of "strategic essentialism" (Bucholtz 2003: 240) can also be used by those in academia to "recognise and legitimate widely devalued linguistic practices" (ibid.).

The assumptions of (more or less) group homogeneity that may result from more essentialist views of identity naturally call to the fore questions of group membership, inclusion, and exclusion: who is seen to be a member of the group, and who isn't (Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001: 243)? For example, according to a simplified example of an extreme essentialist monolingual nation-state ideology, all members of Nation X speak Language X. Anyone who identifies as being part of Nation X without command of Language X, or perhaps of the right variety of Language X, is not seen as a 'true member' of Nation X under this kind of ideology. The boundaries of the language community and of the nation-state are often assumed to be one and the same.

According to more essentialist conceptions of identity, the language use of certain members of a speaker group may be afforded more authenticity or legitimacy than that of other members due to the characteristics possessed by the individuals themselves, and not necessarily (or not only) those of their actual language use (Bucholtz 2003: 400). Bucholtz (ibid.) terms this "authenticity from essentialism", such that "'real' group members possess inalienable or inherent characteristics criterial of membership, e.g. biology and/or culture". The language use of speakers that are assumed to possess these valued characteristics may be viewed as more authentic than that of other speakers. A shift away from the kinds of language use associated with such speakers would then be viewed as a decrease in authenticity (ibid.).

It is clear from the (admittedly extreme) example given above that essentialist views of identity, such as "equating a language with a 'people'" (Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001: 246), although useful in some circumstances, are often overly simplistic, and even have the potential to be harmful, especially when applied by academic linguists to complex real-world situations of language use. Sociolinguistics today generally recognises the complexity of the language-identity relationship. Although the precise nature of identity has been a topic of

much debate, the concept of identity "seems to possess considerable explanatory force" (Wodak et al. 2009: 11) in explaining how speakers use language, and why they may value certain forms of linguistic expression and not others. Postmodern approaches to sociolinguistics often deconstruct earlier essentialist ideas such as language=race=culture=nationality=ethnicity (Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001: 251). Instead, identity is viewed as complex and subject to change.

Evidently, postmodern conceptions of identity therefore problematise the link between, for example, national identity and language, a link which arose from earlier European nationalist movements. However, that does not mean that a link between language and national identity is not important or present for many people (Jackson 2017: 2). Bourdieu (1991) states that a linguistic variety can have symbolic value, either as being 'superior' to other varieties, or as emblemising a national identity.

The complexity of the language-identity relationship is further exemplified by the fact that a person can be a member of multiple identity groups. In other words, their personal identity is likely made up of more than one component part (Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001: 249). For example, Omoniyi (2006: 18) describes identity as being "multiple and multi-layered", while Norton (2000; in Martin-Rubio 2006: 2) speaks of identity as "multiple and non-unitary". For Craib (1998), there are different "facets" of a person's identity that make up a whole individual. Therefore, a person may, and most often does, identify in many ways, or as a member of many groups, while still retaining their sense of self.

Postmodern sociolinguistics also understands identity to be subject to change over time (Craib 1998: 4; Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001: 249). Vignoles et al. (2006: 208) state that a person's identity is likely to be continuous. This does not preclude change over time, but rather means that an individual will create a thread or story regarding their identity over their lifetime, and their current identity will be situated within that life story. This is similar to Giddens' (1991) claim that individuals create their own coherent identity narratives, which is what they show to others. An individual's identity can and most likely will change, with parts being gained or lost over time, but the overall self will remain identifiable (Craib 1998: 4).

Identity is also understood not just as changing over time, but also as changing in a context-dependent way. As Perez-Milans (2016: 84) put it, understanding identity is a matter of asking "why that, in this way, right now?". As Omoniyi (2006) explains in their Hierarchy of Identities Model, the different facets of an individual's identity, their different 'selves', can become more or less salient depending on the context in which the individual finds themselves. This model views identity, or identification, as a process in which a hierarchy of identity roles are created and managed (Omoniyi 2006: 11). Any one of these roles may be privileged according to "the appropriateness of the moment" (ibid. 13), being shunted to the top of our hierarchy of identities because it is most relevant in a particular context.

The idea of identity being made up of constituent parts and of these parts as dynamic is linked to the possible reasons one might identify with a particular label or group. Vignoles et al. (2006: 308) state that those parts of a persons' identity that are most essential, namely that the individual identifies with most closely, are those that "provide a greater sense of self-esteem, continuity, distinctiveness, and meaning". These are "motives for belonging" (ibid.), which "guide identity construction" (ibid. 309) by pressuring an individual towards certain states of identity that satisfy these motives and away from those that do not. For example, if identifying as a Language X speaker gives an individual a greater sense of distinctiveness, that is a "sense of differentiation from others" (ibid. 310), that individual is more likely to identify as a Language X speaker, and to value their identity as such. They are also more likely to experience greater well-being when their "behaviour is consistent with identity" (ibid. 309); therefore, if the individual identifying as a Language X speaker in fact has knowledge of and uses Language X, they are likely to experience greater well-being.

We can also see that language plays a vital role in the relation of one's identity to other identities does not occur in a vacuum, and is often constructed and maintained in contrast to others' identities. It is relational, as it serves to "describe the relationship between entities" (Wodak et al. 2009: 11). This relationship may be one of similarity, which may take the form of positioning one's identity as close to or the same as some concept or group. Or it may be one of difference, which involves positioning one's identity as distinct or separate from a concept or group (Edwards 2012; Craib 1998). Omoniyi (2006: 14) refers to identity construction as "the construction of otherness in order to construct the self". Language is a useful tool for an individual to claim or perform similarity or difference between their own identity and another's. In the words of Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985: 181): "the individual creates for himself the patterns of his linguistic behaviour so as to resemble those of the group or groups with which […] he wishes to be identified, or so as to be unlike those from whom he wishes to be distinguished".

4. New speakers – Identity and Language Minoritization

Existing research seems to suggest that the relationship between language and identity functions in a unique way in certain multilingual contexts, such as those of language minoritization. Such multilingual settings further problematise any direct link between language and identity. Minority language speakers are most likely multilingual, and may identify both with their minority language speaker group and with the majority language of the nation-state. Jackson states that, due to the intertwined nature of language and culture for many people, being

multilingual in a world that largely privileges monolingual ideologies and identities may "trigger feelings of loss or inbetweenness" (Jackson 2017: 5). This may lead to the development of hybrid or mixed identities made up of different "cultural selves", which may be associated with the use of different languages (ibid. 7). They give the example of a bilingual speaker who associates the use of a minority language with a "local self" and the majority language with a "global self". Language minoritization therefore further problematises views of identity that stem from essentialism due to the "multiple loyalties" to which minority language speakers are often subject (Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001: 253).

Within minority language contexts, the relationship between the minority language and new speakers' identities in particular seems to function in a specific way. new speakers may negotiate their identity in contrast with other groups. For new speakers of Irish this includes "native speakers, non-Irish speakers, or those with the *cúpla focal* who acquired it at school but rarely use it" (O'Rourke and Walsh 2020: 31). This will likely vary between communities. For example, new speakers of Manx cannot easily construct their identities of new speakers in contrast to native speakers, as they do not have access to such a group. These other groups may also identify an individual as a new speaker, but this may not necessarily carry the same connotations as it might have for the new speaker themselves. It may mean something more negative, for example the new speaker label "can be used as a derogatory label to contest the legitimacy of new speakers as "real" speakers" (O'Rourke and Pujolar 2013: 57). This may be seen in the example of the Irish label *Gaeilgeoir* ('Irish speaker'), which is "sometimes used as a derogatory label to describe learners of Irish and/or Irish language enthusiasts" (O'Rourke and Walsh 2020: 18).

The identification of oneself as a 'new speaker' does not occur in a vacuum. As Jaffe (2015: 29) notes, one's self-identification as a new speaker may rely on other new speakers ratifying this self-identification, which may not always happen. This begs the question as to what an individual's identification as a new speaker is 'worth' if they do not operate in this role within their communities from the perspective of other community members. We might also ask what relation other speakers' view of a self-identified new speaker has to linguistic competency. Jaffe (2015: 29) states that "attributions of speaker identity have a variable relationship to speakers' displayed competence, depending on the evaluative framework in operation. Sometimes, relatively limited linguistic tokens are 'taken as' indices of significant competence; on other occasions relatively substantial tokens are misrecognized or ignored." That is to say, different speakers and different communities may have different competency criteria by which they judge membership to a new speaker cohort, and different structural features may be more or less important within this.

Members of linguistic minority communities may also find more use for essentialism than most. Edwards (2012: 493) states that the symbolic function of language is thrown into "stark relief" in minority language settings. As aforementioned, essentialism can be a useful tool to create a group norm that may be differentiated from majority linguistic and cultural practices (Bucholtz, 2003). This can be a good base for further struggles for language justice for an oppressed group. It may also be a basis for (re)constructions of social identities, traditions, and heritage during decolonisation. The language, or the idea of the language, may become a positive marker of intergroup identity and a marker of distinctiveness against enforced homogeneity by the dominant culture, regardless of the competence of individual community members in the language. This is evident in the function of Jèrriais and Guernsiais in the Channel Islands as reported by Sallabank (2013).

New speakers also often have strong feelings about the minority language (Hornsby 2015: 121), and the minority language may serve as an important part of the construction of a new speaker's identity. In a similar vein, O'Rourke and Walsh (2020: 33) state that some new speakers of Irish use the language "to express and symbolise their individuality". New speakers may therefore be less likely to view the language as solely an instrument for communication, but also as a symbolic representation of something external to the language and as a part of their own individual lifestyle. That said, new speakers have multiplicities of identities which may interlink with their identity as a speaker of a minority language (Jaffe 2015: 29). For example, heritage may be an important pole for some new speakers (Jaffe 2015: 29), but not for others, particularly those who do not have heritage links to the traditional language.

The idea of personal choice seems to be an important aspect of new speakerhood; this is an identity group which, in contrast to some other groups such as native speakers, a person can choose at any time to become a part of. Most new speakers have made an active commitment (of whatever type or intensity) to become a speaker of the minority language and thus an agent in its revitalization, which imbues some level of status but also involves sustained emotional, mental, and often financial labour (Jaffe 2015: 29). Individuals may therefore have a "vested interest" in identifying as a new speaker (Hornsby 2015: 121). That said, not all new speakers will have made the choice to learn the language themselves (i.e. child new speakers), or they may have made the choice to learn the minority language for financial (or similar) reasons (e.g. some Galician new speakers – see O'Rourke and Ramallo 2015). We should therefore note that identity may function differently for these types of new speakers for whom the notion of personal choice operates in different ways.

5. Language and Identity in the Isle of Man

The Isle of Man is no stranger to questions of identity, even outwith the Manx new speaker community. Lewis (2004: 1) describes the Isle of Man as currently undergoing an "identity crisis of cultural confidence". She links this to the ongoing demographic shift that the Island is experiencing. Over the last two centuries, having become home to large numbers of historical and current immigrants from (mostly) the UK. The population of the Isle of Man is today made up of a high percentage of residents that have personal and/or ancestral ties to the UK. As of 2021, 49.6% of the Island's resident population was born in the Isle of Man, and 38.3% in the UK (Isle of Man Government 2022: 11). In community discourse on the topic, the immigrant population is often contrasted with so-called 'ethnic Manx' residents – a term often used in the community to describe residents both born in the Isle of Man and/or with Manx ancestry (as evidenced in Lewis 2004). A not-insignificant portion of the population is also made up of those who were born on the Isle of Man to immigrant parents, or whose parents immigrated to the Isle of Man when they were very young. Various intra-communal classifications of this type have been reported on the Isle of Man (c.f. Lewis' 2004 discussion of 'come-overs' vs 'stay-overs'). The demographic makeup of the Isle of Man is therefore varied, and, in the present author's experience (as a member of the latter group and a self-identified 'stay-over'), the nature and strength of the connection that Manx residents have to a 'Manx' identity also varies greatly.

The nature of identity, and its relationship to language in the Isle of Man, is therefore a complex one. The few studies that exist on the relationship between identity formation and language use on the Island illustrate this.

Lewis (2004)'s ethnographic study explores the question of 'Manxness', and provides some answers to the question of what it means to be 'Manx' in the 21st century (Lewis 2004: 1). She defines Manxness as "an idea, a set of values" and "a way of relating to place and to each other" (Lewis 2004: 16). Within the context of demographic shift, for most a Manx identity is now not confined to a subset of residents with ancestral links to the Isle of Man; "a Manx identity could be, and has been, shared with incomers" (ibid.). She found that, although there was a desire among her participants to maintain and assert a Manx cultural distinctiveness (Lewis 2004: 13), this was not at the expense of Islanders who originated from elsewhere. Rather, various symbolic forms associated with the Island's cultural revival (such as the Tynwald Day ceremony[1]) were able to be shared across the community. As such, the "performance of Manxness" was not

[1] This is both the celebration of the ancient parliament of the Isle of Man and the country's national day.

found to be restricted to any specific group (Lewis 2004: 14); indeed, such symbolic forms often served as "sites of cultural performance" for incomers to participate in their newly-chosen Manx identity (ibid.: 15). Indeed, a commitment to these symbolic forms was often seen as an important part of the ratification of one's Manx identity by other community members (ibid.: 147).

The Manx language was one such symbolic form that Lewis' informants, a mix of Manx New speakers and monolingual Anglophone Islanders, felt was important for accessing and performing Manxness (Lewis 2004: 18). This is not to say that Manx Gaelic was equated to a Manx identity by most participants, but rather that the language was, similar to other cultural reference points, a way for Island residents of all backgrounds to claim and perform their Manxness and their social and cultural commitment to the Island (ibid.: 78, 79). Again, for these informants Manx played a symbolic role in distinguishing the Isle of Man from surrounding territories, and presenting an image to the outside world that highlighted the Island's cultural uniqueness (ibid.: 78). It should however be highlighted that among Lewis' informants there was a range of responses with regards to their personal connections with both Manxness, the Manx language, and the Manx-speaking community.

McCooey-Heap's (2020) study of Manx English presents similar findings with regards to the importance of language to a Manx identity. Manx English, or Anglo-Manx, is a variety of English that came to be spoken in the Isle of Man during the linguistic shift from Manx to English (McCooey-Heap 2020). There are several linguistic features that distinguish Manx English from other varieties. Most salient for speakers, though, are the various lexical items peculiar to Manx English that have been borrowed (or are perceived to have been borrowed) from Manx Gaelic. Greater knowledge and use of these lexical items by Manx English speakers was found to be associated with a stronger 'Manx cultural identity', as measured by engagement with various Manx cultural metrics (ibid.). Two of these lexical items in particular, *skeet* (meaning gossip; a quick glance) and *yessir* (casual form of address), were especially salient for speakers. McCooey-Heap (2020: 266) posits that these terms, especially when featured on 'Manx-themed' commercial goods, serve a 'badging' function whereby Islanders can display their affiliation to a Manx identity to others in their community.

6. The Current Study: Aims and Methodology

The present paper provides a preliminary exploration into the relationship between identity and language use among Manx new speakers. It aims to explore similarities and differences to themes on language and identity that have emerged from the existing literature on new speakers of minoritized languages. It discusses the following specific question:

1. How do new speakers of Manx understand 'Manxness' and its relationship to language?

The data presented was gathered by means of sociolinguistic interviews. Sociolinguistic interviews are a well-established method of gathering qualitative data in sociolinguistics, with interviews being "among the most widely-used methods of data elicitation in the social sciences" (Karatsareas 2022: 99). When interviews are approached in this way, it is the content of the interviewees' speech that is of primary interest (Karatsareas 2022: 99). The interviews therefore involved explicitly asking participants about the role of Manx in their conception of their own identity.

The interviews were undertaken with just the researcher alone with the participant. Group interviews would have been preferable, as the small group method had certain advantages in that it reduces the power imbalance inherent in an interview for research purposes and thus reduces the impact of this on the data (Schilling 2013). However, they proved difficult to arrange with participants due to limitations of timing. The interviews generally lasted for around 45 minutes to over an hour. All data collection has been anonymised, and therefore interview participants have been given pseudonyms in the current paper and in the study in question. The majority of the interviews took place either at a participant's home, or in a comfortable public setting, such as a café, and the participants were given control over when and where they would prefer to conduct the interview. Many interviews took place in one café in particular that often hosted Manx-medium events. As such, it was not out of the ordinary to hear Manx being spoken in this particular establishment, and this was something that the proprietors and frequent customers of the café would have been accustomed to hearing. When another setting was used, care was taken to choose a cultural hub, such as a museum, or an established meeting place for informal Manx-speaking meetups and language lessons, to reduce the possible discomfort participants might experience when speaking Manx in a public space. Only on one occasion did speaking Manx in public did attract any feedback from the public, as discussed with reference to Sam's interview below. Participants seemed happy to speak Manx in a public setting during the interviews.

The choice of language used by the researcher is important when working in multilingual settings, which often come with an inherent linguistic power imbalance (O'Rourke 2022: 271). The sociolinguistic interviews were done through the medium of Manx, meaning that both the researcher and the participant spoke Manx for the majority of the interview, with the exception of some code-switching or tags in English which are commonly used among Manx speakers, and some specialist vocabulary for which it was more appropriate to use English.

Firstly, the ability to converse in Manx ensured that the participant had a good enough linguistic competence in Manx to provide sufficient quality data on the morphosyntactic norms of Manx new speakers. Indeed, one definition of new speakers (i.e. that of Ramallo, O'Rourke, and Pujolar 2015, in Jaffe 2015: 25) state that a "a socially and communicatively consequential level of competence" is generally a feature of the new speaker. The ability to hold a conversation in Manx was therefore sought among participants for this research.

Secondly, the decision to hold the entire interview through the medium of Manx was influenced by the researcher's previous experience gathering data among this community. In previous fieldwork, the researcher used linguistic interviews to gather structural linguistic data from new speakers of Manx. In these interviews, the interview prompts were designed to directly elicit specific linguistic structures. Therefore, the researcher spoke in English so as not to influence participants' production of the linguistic variables. However, during and after these interviews, participants expressed that it was sometimes awkward and difficult to converse in Manx when the interviewer was speaking in English. Therefore, the decision was made that in the current study the interviewer would speak in Manx unless the participant strongly preferred otherwise, which proved not to be the case the majority of the time.

A semi-structured approach was taken for the interviews in this study, although in practice the interviews tended towards the less structured end. This semi-structured approach was designed to ensure that as many topics as possible were covered during the interviews. It enabled the researcher to monitor the flow of the interviews, and to refocus back onto the desired topic if necessary. However, it also left room for me to spontaneously pose different questions if interesting research dimensions arose that I had not previously considered (Karatsareas 2022: 100).

The interviews were recorded with written consent, and then transcribed in a naturalised style, adhering closely to written discourse and spelling conventions for Manx (Bucholtz 2000: 1439). As the research questions were concerned with gathering data on morphological features used by new speakers of Manx, the transcription was broad, and did not attempt to represent phonological features or variation where that was present in the recordings. Any grammatical idiosyncrasies produced by interviewees were retained in the transcriptions, in the interest of other research questions explored by this PhD which pertain to linguistic structure. All data was anonymised, and the analysis below makes use of pseudonyms for participants.

The approach taken to analysing the interview transcript data was Thematic Analysis. Specifically, this study used Reflexive Thematic Analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2019; 2020), which foregrounds the active role of the researcher in the data analysis process (Clarke and Braun 2017: 297). Thematic

Analysis is an incredibly useful tool for reducing large and diverse data sets down to essential themes that are relevant to the researcher's specific questions or area(s) of interest (Clarke and Braun 2017: 297). The steps followed during the data analysis were those of Braun and Clarke (2006: 87). These are the following:

i. Familiarizing oneself with the data
ii. Generating initial codes
iii. Searching for themes
iv. Reviewing themes
v. Defining and naming themes
vi. Producing report

The following sections present discussion of selected findings from the author's ongoing PhD research.

7. Themes on Manxness, Language, and Identity

The researcher received varying responses to questions about Manx identity, which can be expected considering the varied backgrounds of Manx New speakers. Participants varied in terms of where they were born, brought up, or chose to settle later in life. Some were born in the Isle of Man and had at some point moved away, with most returning to or maintaining links with the Island. Others were born elsewhere, most often the UK, and had chosen to make the Isle of Man their home. Participants therefore expressed varying degrees of attachment to a 'Manx' identity.

The following sections outline selected themes on language and identity that came to the fore in the preliminary thematic analysis of interview and observational data. These themes are also discussed with reference to findings from previous studies on language and identity in the Isle of Man and other minoritized language communities, as discussed above. The quotes in the section below have been edited for ease of reading; pauses and false starts have been removed, and are indicated by an ellipsis. Punctuation has also been added, and an English translation of the original quotes has been provided. Where participants produced 'ungrammatical' forms in Manx, these have been retained in the quotes chosen.

7.1. Manxness as a Static Category

As discussed above, there are varying views on national identity present in the Isle of Man, and this was reflected in the members of the Manx New speaker community the researcher spoke to in research interactions. Some of the Manx

New speaker participants interviewed presented a view of their own relationship with a Manx identity that resembles more essentialist views of identity as discussed by Omoniyi (2006), Bucholtz (2003), and Martin-Rubio (2006) above.

As might be expected, many participants who had been born and raised in the Isle of Man clearly identified with a Manx national identity. This was true of 'Orry', as is shown in the following extract:

> Erin: "So cre mychione ve Manninagh? C'red ta shen meanal er-dty-hon?"
>
> Orry: *"T'eh meanal dy row mee ruggit ayns Mannin, as cha nel eh veg smoo ny shen dooys…* Aye *cha nel mee… moyrnagh dy ve my Vanninagh… she* fact *t'ayn… as shen ooilley."*
>
> Erin: "So what about being Manx? What does that mean for you?"
>
> Orry: "It means that I was born on the Isle of Man, and nothing more than that to me… Aye I'm not […] proud of being Manx […] it's a fact […] and that's all."

Although Orry clearly would describe himself as Manx, he did not express a large degree of emotional attachment to the label. Rather, he viewed being Manx as an undeniable fact about himself, but not one that he built a large part of his identity around.

That said, not all of the Manx New speaker participants described themselves as Manx. A lack of feeling 'Manx' was mostly reported by community members who had been born somewhere other than the Isle of Man, and/or who had lived elsewhere for a significant portion of their life before moving to the Island. As such, they often retained a national identity reflective of their country of origin. This was true of "Niamh", who was born in Scotland and still identifies as Scottish, despite having lived in the Isle of Man for most of her life.

"Em" reported feeling similarly. She was not born on the Island but settled there as an adult. Despite heavy involvement in the Manx New speaker community and life in the Isle of Man in general, Em wouldn't describe herself as 'Manx'. When asked about feeling 'Manx', she stated:

> Em: "*Cha row mee ruggit aynshoh* […] *Cha noddym gra dy vel mee my Vanninagh*."

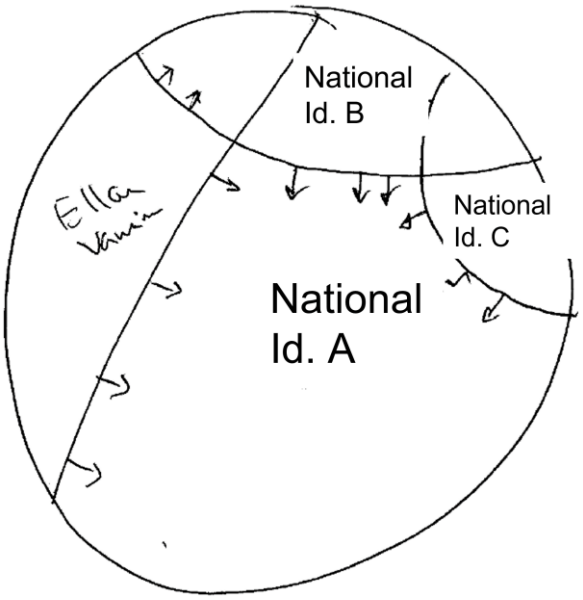
Em: “I wasn’t born here […] I cannot say that I am Manx.”

In the above examples, participants seem to present ‘Manxness’ as some immutable category that one is assigned at some point in life, possibly birth. ‘Manxness’ is also considered to be dichotomous – one is either Manx or one is not. This is in line with a more essentialist view of identity, with a view that one either possesses or does not possess some essential criterion of group membership (Bucholtz, 2003: 400).

7.2. Manxness as Changeable

However, some participants described their identity as complex and multifaceted, more in line with postmodern conceptions of identity (e.g. that of Blackledge and Pavlenko, 2001: 249). For example, Juliet was born and grew up in the Isle of Man, but has since lived in many other countries before returning to the Island to retire. She described her identity in terms of multiple affliliations; she identifies with the label ‘Manx’, but also with several other labels relating to countries in which she has lived, and roles she has fulfilled in her professional life. She also describes a growing feeling of Manxness that coincides with her return to the Island and her becoming involved with the Manx New speaker community. Despite spending her childhood on the Island, she stated that: “I feel more Manx now than I ever have.”

Other Manx speakers, some who moved to the Island from elsewhere, also describe their national identity as changing over time, again in line with



postmodern dynamic models of identity, as discussed above. For example, "Sam", who moved to the Island from elsewhere in Europe, describes changes in the amount he felt 'Manx' over his lifetime in terms of percentages in a pie chart, as shown below:
The diagram as drawn by Sam shows his total individual identity as composed of several different national identities, one of which is a Manx identity, as shown by the *Ellan Vannin* ('Isle of Man' in Manx) label in the top left portion of the diagram. All other national identities described by Sam in the above diagram have been anonymised, thus his handwritten notes have been replaced with typed labels. As indicated by the arrows, he indicates that there has been an increase over time in the degree to which he feels varying national identity labels apply to him, include a Manx national identity. He describes a feeling of 'Manxness' starting sometime after his move to the Isle of Man. He also described a key point after which this feeling began to increase significantly, which was the point where he made the decision to acquire the Manx language.

7.3. Manxness, the Manx Language, and Cultural Heritage

As evidenced by the above discussion, Manx speakers vary in the extent to which they feel that they are "Manx". For those participants in this study who did identify with this label, they gave varying reasons as to why they identify the way that they do.

Evidently, many participants, such as Orry above, relate Manxness to having been born on the Isle of Man. However, for some of these participants, more than just birth, the idea of cultural heritage was important for their identification as Manx. They would often reference the fact that they and their ancestors had been born on the Isle of Man, and had been Manx speakers. This was true of Mona, who said:

> Mona: "*Ta kiangley dowin aym [rish ve 'Manninagh'] […] as shen yn… heritage aym neesht as gollrish ny ancestors aym […] hie shin erash gys ny […] queig-jeig keeadyn […] v'ad loayrt Gaelg*."
>
> Mona: "I have a profound link [to being 'Manx'] … and that's my heritage as well and like my ancestors… we went back to the… fifteen hundreds… they spoke Manx."

For some Manx speakers who took part in the study, this idea of an 'ancestral' link to Manxness and thus to the language took precedence over birth. For example, Richard recounts how he was born in England to parents who originated in the Isle of Man. His frequent childhood visits to the Island, as well as his family links there, gave him a sense of Manxness which he noted was not always shared by his fellow community members.

Many speakers, like Mona above, also spoke about the importance of Manx having been spoken in the history of their family. Often, this served as some impetus to acquire the language in the first place, as a way of feeling closer to their ancestors and carrying on their linguistic legacy. For example, Richard discusses hearing his great aunt say *'focklyn as raaghyn quaagh'* ("strange words and phrases") throughout his childhood, that he later realised, with the help of his parents' book collection, were from another language.

The idea of cultural heritage plays varying roles in personal identity in new speaker communities – it may be important for some, but not others (Jaffe 2015). Evidently, for some Manx speakers, an 'ancestral' link to the cultural heritage of the Manx language can be something one is born with. However, that is not to say that all Manx new speakers were in agreement on this front. In this vein, some Manx speakers were openly critical of more essentialist views of the role of cultural heritage in Manxness, in that they critiqued conceptions of Manxness that focus solely on cultural heritage. For example, Mona, although stressing the importance of ancestry and heritage for her own personal Manxness, asserts that this should not be so for everyone who uses the label:

> Erin: "So *vel oo smooinaghtyn […] my va peiagh ayn as cha row ad ruggit ayns Mannin […] vel ad Manninagh?"*
>
> Mona: "*My t'ad geearree ve Manninagh […] my t'ou geearree ve Manninagh as t'ou cummal aynshoh as t'ou gennaghtyn […] gollrish Manninagh […] ta shen red ennagh* individual *dhyt."*
>
> Erin: "So do you think […] if there was someone who wasn't born in the Isle of Man […] are they Manx?"
>
> Mona: "If they want to be Manx […] if you want to be Manx and you live here and you feel […] like [a] Manx [person] […] that is something that's individual to you".

Statements such as the above emphasise the role of personal choice and agency in identifying oneself as 'Manx', which aligns with more postmodern views on identity. They present Manxness as a category you can 'move into', a label that you might choose to adopt or identify with at some point in life. This echoes Lewis' (2004) findings that Manxness is something one may claim or perform in order to assert one's chosen identity as Manx.

7.4. The Manx Language and the Cultural Performance of Manxness

For interviewees, participation in certain cultural behaviours seemed to be a key factor for an individual being able to claim Manxness, or not. These behaviours are often intertwined with each other, and include involvement in local and political life of the Island, knowledge of and participation in cultural and historical traditions, and knowledge of and competence in the Manx language, which echoes the discussion in Lewis (2004).

Not all speakers reported using these same avenues to express Manxness, which "Voirrey" acknowledges in her discussion of the variety in the Manx-speaking community:

> Voirrey: "*Ta mee geearree dagh ooilley pheiagh ['sy co-phobble] […] jus jean ny reddyn t'ou […] geearree jannoo […] cha nel dagh ooilley pheiagh geearree goaill arrane sy Gaelg."*
>
> Voirrey: "I want everybody [in the community] … just do the things that you want to do… not everybody wants to sing in Manx."

In the above, Voirrey, a musician herself, is referencing the fact that traditional music may be an important cultural outlet for many Manx speakers, but this is not true for every speaker, as does not preclude one from claiming membership in the Manx-speaking community.

Many of the Manx new speaker participants described how acquiring Manx and using Manx was the key cultural behaviour that they used to express their membership of the Island's community. For example, "Juliet", who was born on the Island, states that after beginning to acquire the language, she "feels more Manx now than [she] ever ha[s]". This was a key point for Sam also: in order to affirm his chosen identity as a Manx person, an identity in which the Manx language played a key part in his adopting, he continues to speak Manx.

Evidently, as this study focusses on Manx speakers, the views of non-Manx-speaking members of the Isle of Man community are not represented here. However, it does seem as though, at least for some of them, the Manx language, at least in the abstract, serves as an important part of the cultural performance of their own individual Manx identity (c.f. McCooey-Heap, 2020 on the badging function of Manx on items as a way of indexing a Manx identity). For those for whom this is the case, and yet who do not speak Manx, this mismatch between self-conception and behaviour seems to result in some negative feelings.

That is to say that there seems to be a sentiment among some non-Manx-speaking Manx people that they "should" be able to speak Manx. Such discourses

of obligation became evident at various points in my research, but were made especially clear during the interview conducted with Sam. In the middle of our conversation the interview was interrupted by the entrance of his colleague, who upon hearing Manx being spoken, remarked that "I can't speak any [Manx]", even though she was "a local" (unlike Sam, perhaps, who originated in continental Europe) so "should be able to". This clearly shows that the idea of being Manx and speaking Manx are linked for her, but that this has not extended to her personal acquisition of the language.

7.5. The Manx Language and the Nation-State

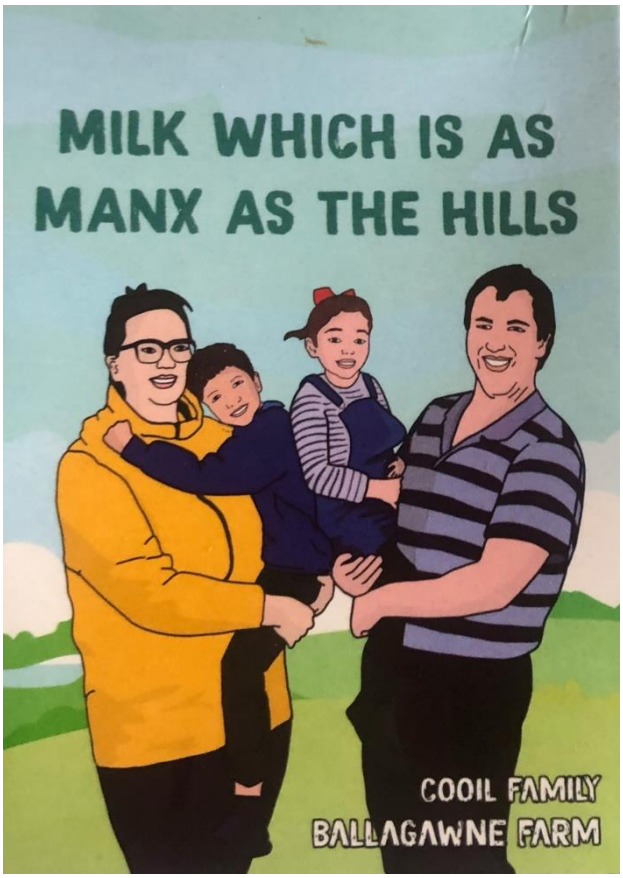
Many interview participants identified a strong link between the Manx language and the national identity of the Isle of Man, presenting Manx as an essential characteristic of the nation-state, or somehow emblematic of it. This is evident in the following quote from 'Em':

> Em*: "T'eh [y Ghaelg] ayrn jeh'n Ellan as ta mee smooinaghtyn dy beagh yn Ellan ny smoo boght gyn yn Gaelg."*
>
> Em: "It's [Manx] part of the Island and I think the Island would be poorer without Manx."

Em clearly views Manx as an essential component of the Island itself. However, like many other Manx New speakers interviewed, Em found it difficult to expand on or qualify her opinion. For her, the ideological connection between the Isle of Man as a nation and the Manx language is self-evident, to the extent that she became slightly exasperated at the interviewer's attempts to probe deeper into her statement. However, this exchange in and of itself exemplifies the link that is often made between the language and the nation-state in the Isle of Man, both by speakers and non-speakers of Manx, that is commonly made but rarely analysed closely.

Some Manx new speakers, however, were able to provide more information about how they viewed the link between the Manx language and the broader national identity of the Isle of Man. Some, such as 'Juliet', couched their discussions in the physical environment, citing connections between the language and physical space in the form of the Island's place names, many of which derive from Manx, with greater or lesser degrees of Anglicisation. Through this discussion, Juliet recalls her growing awareness and understanding of her physical environment as intimately connected to her journey as a learner-speaker of Manx. For her, the acquisition of the language provides another layer of understanding of and belonging to the Island.

The connection between Manxness and the physical landscape is a common link made in the Isle of Man, both within and outwith the Manx speaker community. This is evidenced by the common saying "as Manx as the hills", as evidenced by the below image, taken from a milk carton produced by a local creamery.



The company in question is clearly emphasising the 'Manxness' (and thus localness, and thus desirability) of their product by making use of this commonly-heard refrain. Some of the Manx New speakers I met with, however, were critical of such ideologies when expressed by non-Manx-speaking Islanders. Juan's statement implies that the link between Manxness and physical landscape is incomplete without knowledge of the Manx language.

Yet other speakers referenced the role of the language in the group social identity of residents of the Isle of Man. Illiam, for example, explained that he considered Manx to be a "kind of social glue" intended to bring the community

together. In this kind of view, the language serves as a positive symbol of a Manx identity that would be accessible to anybody living on the Isle of Man. This links to the idea of "Manxness" as a shared symbol as discussed by Lewis (2004) above.

8. Concluding Comments

This paper explored some themes emerging from existing literature and ongoing sociolinguistic studies on how identity and language work in the context of new speakers of Manx on the Isle of Man. The current study begins to shed light on the varying ways in which new speakers of Manx conceptualise their own identity as speakers, as well as the identity of their communities. Some speakers present their views on their own and others' identities in a way that aligns more closely with essentialist conceptions of identity, viewing 'Manxness' as a fixed quality that an individual either does or does not possess, often for reasons largely out of one's control, such as birth or family heritage. Yet other speakers express views on identity that bear closer resemblance to postmodern understandings of identity, highlighting the role of agency and personal choice in an individual identifying as Manx. Many of these speakers also discussed the changeable nature of their own identities and identification with Manxness. All of the above highlights the complexity of identity for members of linguistic minority communities, especially for new speakers.

The paper also highlighted how the Manx language has emerged as a key site for the performance of a Manx identity for many of its new speakers. The language is one of a constellation of cultural practices that new speakers engage in to signal or 'badge' their Manx identity. The Manx language was also shown to be a 'gateway' for many speakers in their adoption of a Manx, or at least more Manx, identity. And yet, it was also established that, for many speakers, identifying as 'Manx' is not a prerequisite for being a Manx speaker, and indeed the two may be mutually exclusive. The identity label *Gaelgeyr*, or Manx speaker, has therefore emerged as an identity label in its own right, connected to but not dependent on a Manx national identity or any other cultural practice. The language therefore brings together a community of varying national backgrounds and connections to Manx culture more broadly.

All of the above highlights the need for further research in the area of language and identity for new speaker communities. This is particularly true in the Manx context: the current paper summarises everything that has been written on the subject to the best of the author's knowledge. The current author would also welcome further research on how identity ties into language practices in minoritized language communities that are undergoing revitalization, particularly where there is no extant traditional speaker identity model to orient oneself

towards. This would be particularly relevant for such subsections of new speaker communities that experience marginalization in other ways, e.g. due to racism, sexism, homophobia, or transphobia. It would be pertinent to consider how such speakers construct their identities outside of the typically male, white, and heterosexual traditional speaker archetype. The agentive use of linguistic structure and variation by new speakers in order to index identity in new speaker communities like that of the Isle of Man would also be of great interest to this author.

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"ᚈ IS BEITH AND MEANS BIRCH" – *AN EXPLORATION OF OGHAM IN ONLINE FANFICTION FEATURING KING ALFRED THE GREAT*[1]

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ABSTRACT

Through an analysis of three selected case studies, this study unveils how Ogham's integration into contemporary narratives generates fresh layers of meaning and revitalises this ancient alphabet. The chosen focus on Alfredian fanfiction offers a contextualised exploration of the role of this ancient Irish script in shaping novel interpretations, bridging historical languages with the digital age, and shedding light on how fan communities reconfigure cultural heritage across temporal and geographical boundaries within the dynamic landscape of internet culture. By employing a comprehensive approach, this research elucidates the intricate interplay between Ogham, historical narratives, and contemporary fan creativity, providing valuable insights into how this ancient script sparks innovative meanings and propels narratives within the digital realms of fan culture.

KEYWORDS:Ogham, fanfiction, Alfredism, medievalism, intertextual storytelling

1. Introduction

The digital era has witnessed the emergence of unprecedented modes of cultural exchange and expression, often drawing inspiration from historical artefacts. One such instance is the phenomenon of Alfredian fanfiction, which involves reimagining and retelling stories based on the historical figure King Alfred the Great. Although the historical king Alfred has been dead and buried for eleven centuries, now, at the beginning of the 21st century, the mythical Alfred is very

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much alive and serves as a canvas on which fans rewrite the stories. Intriguingly, some of the fanfictions about King Alfred incorporate Ogham, often as a means of imbuing narratives with an aura of mystique and historical worldbuilding. To comprehensively explore this phenomenon, I will analyse three case studies of Ogham usage within Alfredian fanfiction. These case studies offer distinct perspectives, each highlighting different facets of the integration of Ogham into fan-created narratives.

As noted by Zduńczyk, Rogulska and Sokulski (2022: 20), fanfiction "has been scarcely researched in relation to minority languages and language revitalisation." This article aims to contribute to this by examining three case studies of Ogham in Alfredian fanfiction. Additionally, this analysis will provide valuable insights into how fan communities are reinterpreting cultural heritage, transcending temporal and geographical boundaries, and forming new traditions in the digital age. This exploration holds significant importance in the context of both cultural studies and the evolving dynamics of fan communities. Firstly, it highlights the adaptability and resilience of historical scripts like Ogham in the face of rapidly changing digital communication paradigms. As contemporary audiences engage with these ancient symbols, they not only pay homage to their historical roots but also reinterpret them, thereby fostering a continuum of cultural evolution. Secondly, the study underscores the transformative power of fanfiction as a creative and collaborative platform within online fan cultures. It sheds light on how fan communities, through their imaginative storytelling, can reframe historical narratives and challenge conventional interpretations, offering fresh perspectives on cultural heritage and identity. Furthermore, this examination serves as a testament to the enduring relevance of history in the digital age, where past and present converge to shape the narratives of the future. As fan communities forge connections across temporal and geographical boundaries, they contribute to the ongoing discourse of historical reinterpretation and the formation of novel cultural traditions, demonstrating the profound impact of internet culture on our understanding of heritage and storytelling.

2. Online Fanfiction

The rise of the internet and digital platforms has significantly transformed the landscape of fan culture, giving birth to vibrant online communities and providing outlets for fan creativity (Bury et al. 2013). Websites such as Tumblr, DeviantArt, and LiveJournal played pivotal roles in fostering fandom and serving as hubs for self-expression, including the creation and sharing of fan art and fanfiction during the period of 2010-2020 (Fink and Miller 2014). Fans found various avenues of expression within these online fan communities. While visual fan art held a prominent place, fanfiction emerged as an equally significant form of creative

engagement within fan works. In the context of online platforms, fanfiction took shape not only as standalone stories but also as paratext to accompany the fan works or as reactions and responses to the images created by other users (Fathallah 2017; Hill and Pecoskie 2014). On platforms like Tumblr, fans often utilise fanfiction as a complementary element to the visual fan art they share (Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter 2014). Fan artists provide descriptions, backstories, and narrative snippets alongside their artwork, enriching the imagery with written narratives. These paratextual elements deepen the storytelling aspect and allow fans to explore character development, relationships, and world-building beyond the confines of visual representation. Moreover, fanfiction later found its way onto social media networking websites, broadening its reach and accessibility. Platforms such as Facebook and its local variants, like the Dutch website Hyves, became gathering places for fans to share and discuss their written works (Corten 2012). These social media platforms provided spaces for fans to create groups, pages, and events dedicated to their respective fandoms, fostering vibrant communities centred around fanfiction. The expansion of fanfiction onto social media networking sites facilitated further engagement and interaction among fans. It allowed for real-time discussions, feedback, and collaborative storytelling efforts. Fans could share their fanfiction pieces directly with their networks of friends and followers, generating conversations and encouraging participation within the fandom community. The emergence of fanfiction as both paratext and independent narratives, alongside the visual fan art, added a new layer of depth and complexity to fan culture (Hill & Pecoskie 2014). It provided fans with the opportunity to explore the emotional and interpersonal aspects of narratives, develop characters in greater detail, and challenge or subvert established tropes and conventions (Leavenworth 2015, Doble 2020).

Alfredian fanfiction is a distinct subgenre within the broader realm of historical fanfiction. It revolves around reimagining and retelling stories based on the historical figure King Alfred the Great (849-899 CE) and the rich tapestry of historical facts, artefacts, and settings associated with his era. Alfredian fanfiction typically draws from two primary sources of inspiration: Bernard Cornwell's The Saxon Stories book series (2004-2020) and the television series The Last Kingdom, which is an adaptation of Cornwell's works. One of the defining features of Alfredian fanfiction is its commitment to incorporating historical facts and artefacts into the narrative fabric. Authors of Alfredian fanfiction often immerse themselves in extensive research to ensure historical accuracy, portraying the nuances of the early medieval period, from the political intricacies of the time to the material culture, such as weaponry, clothing, and architecture. This commitment to historical fidelity enriches the storytelling experience and provides readers with an immersive journey into the past. Alfredian fanfiction frequently embraces the concept of crossovers, wherein characters, themes, or

elements from other historical or fictional universes are interwoven with the Alfredian narrative. These crossovers may introduce characters from other historical periods or fictional settings, creating a fusion of diverse story elements. This approach allows authors to explore innovative narratives and challenge the boundaries of historical accuracy while remaining rooted in the foundational Alfredian narrative.

The presence of an extensive corpus of fanfiction featuring the character of Alfred the Great is certainly recognized. Platforms such as Archive of Our Own (AO3) alone boast a staggering 1,587 fanfictions related to The Last Kingdom, and an additional 314 centred around The Saxon Stories. Moreover, the AO3 currently offers 3,688 fanfictions that take place in the story world of Vikings, the other Netflix series in which Alfred the Great plays a role. These statistics represent merely the tip of the iceberg within the expansive world of fan-created content. The internet's boundless expanse houses a plethora of captivating stories that extend beyond AO3, encompassing an array of intriguing narratives waiting to be explored. Within the scope of my academic interest in Alfredian fanfiction, I conducted an extensive exploration across restricted forums, Facebook groups, mailing lists, and Mastodon instances. These digital platforms serve as fertile ground for the creation and exchange of fanfiction inspired by the works of Alfred, where enthusiastic communities unleash their imagination within this literary universe. Notably, my involvement in these communities has led to an intriguing phenomenon: as others discover my active role in curating and archiving Alfredian fanfiction, I receive frequent referrals. This has resulted in a dynamic process wherein my own online domain serves as a tangible representation of the evolution of this particular subgenre. The content provided by others acts as temporal concretions, meticulously documented and published by me, thereby rendering my platform a valuable resource for the preservation of this unique form of literary expression.

In the context of this article, it is essential to distinguish Alfredian fanfiction from other forms of historical fanfiction. Not all stories set in the broader historical contexts of The Last Kingdom, The Saxon Stories, or related series like Vikings are categorised as Alfredian fanfiction. Alfredian fanfiction specifically centres on the character of Alfred the Great and his era, delving into his life, reign, and the historical events that shaped his time. While related historical series may share temporal or geographical settings, Alfredian fanfiction maintains a distinctive focus on this historical figure. Moreover, it's worth noting that Alfredian fanfiction extends beyond the confines of particular fandoms. While The Last Kingdom and The Saxon Stories serve as primary sources of inspiration, the allure of King Alfred's character and the historical richness of his era have led to the emergence of Alfredian fanfiction in various online communities and platforms. As a result, numerous examples of Alfredian fanfiction can be found

outside of dedicated fandoms, showcasing the enduring fascination with this historical figure and the versatility of Alfredian narratives.

3. Methodology

The analytical framework of this article is rooted in close reading and thematic analysis, to examine three specific case studies within the realm of Alfredian fanfiction: "Learning from the past" by TheAncientScribe, "An Rí Cogaidh agus an Sagart Gaelach: Scéal Grá na Máighdean Íseal faoi Mhágic Ogham" by Aisling O'Malley, and "Alfred y Abigail: Dos secretos" by corasketches. Close reading, a foundational practice in literary analysis, forms the cornerstone of this study's methodology. It involves an examination of the selected fanfictions, paying attention to the text, structure, and thematic nuances. This method allows for a deep exploration of the narrative strategies employed by fan authors to mobilise Ogham within the stories. By delving into the minutiae of the texts, including character interactions, dialogue, and descriptive passages, this study aims to unearth the intricate ways in which Ogham contributes to the advancement of the narrative. Thematic analysis complements the close reading approach by facilitating the identification and categorization of recurring tropes and subtropes within the selected fanfictions. This method entails the systematic extraction and examination of themes and motifs present in the narratives, shedding light on how Ogham intersects with broader narrative elements. By categorising and analysing these thematic patterns, this study seeks to unravel the nuanced strategies employed by fan authors to leverage Ogham in crafting engaging and immersive narratives. Central to the analysis are the tropes and subtropes present in the selected fanfictions. Tropes are recurring narrative conventions or thematic elements that serve as building blocks for storytelling. This study identifies and analyses the tropes employed by fan authors within the Alfredian fanfiction genre, emphasising how these tropes are used in conjunction with Ogham to propel the narrative forward. The examination extends to subtropes, which are nuanced variations or subcategories of broader tropes, providing additional layers of thematic depth and complexity. A pivotal aspect of the analysis is the role of Ogham as a narrative device, exploring how Ogham is woven into the fabric of the narratives, its functions, symbolism, and impact on character development and plot progression.

The selection of a limited number of case studies within the corpus of Alfredian fanfiction is a deliberate choice aimed at facilitating a focused exploration of Ogham's role in generating novel meanings within the context of a particular fandom. While acknowledging the broader spectrum of fanfiction employing Ogham, this article endeavours to provide a comprehensive and illustrative examination of this intriguing intersection of a historical script and

contemporary digital storytelling. The rationale behind this is multifaceted and seeks to strike a balance between depth and breadth of analysis, allowing for a more detailed and nuanced investigation of the utilisation of Ogham within Alfredian fanfiction. This selective approach offers the opportunity to unveil the intricate creative nuances associated with the incorporation of Ogham into narratives, offering a richer understanding of its role in crafting stories. The intent of this study is thus not to provide an exhaustive survey of all Ogham-related fanfiction within this expansive domain. Instead, it aims to focus on a set of representative case studies that highlight diverse approaches to Ogham usage, serving as examples to illuminate the multifaceted ways in which this ancient script is deployed.

While recognizing the existence of Ogham-incorporating fanfiction in various other fandoms, the decision to focus on Alfredian fanfiction is rooted in several key considerations. Firstly, the historical significance of King Alfred the Great and the rich cultural tapestry woven within the world of The Last Kingdom offer a unique backdrop for exploring the multifarious dimensions of Ogham integration. The convergence of history and fiction in this particular context allows for a deeper investigation into how Ogham contributes to the creation of novel meanings, enriched by the historical authenticity of the setting. Furthermore, the focus on Alfredian fanfiction maintains thematic coherence throughout the article. By immersing ourselves in the specific milieu of this fandom, we can draw more meaningful connections between Ogham's utilisation and the character of Alfred the Great as portrayed within this particular cultural narrative. This thematic consistency enhances the depth of our analysis, affording a more profound exploration of the intricate relationship between Ogham, historical scripts, and contemporary digital storytelling.

At the present moment, the corpus Alfredian fanfictions containing Ogham I could find consists of 11 fanworks (cf. Table 1). Three of those 11 were selected for in-depth analysis: “Learning from the past” by TheAncientScribe, “An Rí Cogaidh agus an Sagart Gaelach: Scéal Grá na Máighdean Íseal faoi Mhágic Ogham” by Aisling O’Malley, and “Alfred y Abigail: Dos secretos” by corasketches. The selection of these particular fanfictions was guided by several reasons, each contributing to the depth and breadth of the analysis. One crucial criterion for the selection of these fanfictions was the pivotal role played by Ogham within the narrative. In these chosen stories, Ogham is not merely mentioned or referenced in passing; it is woven into the very fabric of the plot and serves as a central element that propels the story forward. This deliberate integration of Ogham as a driving force in the narrative allows for a more profound exploration of how this ancient script generates new meanings within the context of Alfredian fanfiction. It sheds light on the ways in which fan authors utilise Ogham as a powerful tool for storytelling, historical resonance, and worldbuilding.

Another significant factor contributing to the selection was the representation of multiple languages in the chosen fanfictions. While English serves as a dominant language in fanfiction research, these selected stories introduce linguistic diversity by incorporating languages such as Irish and Spanish. This linguistic variance offers a unique opportunity to examine how Ogham is utilised and interpreted across different linguistic and cultural contexts, although the scope of this article allows for only three texts to be analysed, it provides tentative insights into the transcultural adaptability of Ogham and its capacity to resonate with audiences beyond the confines of the English-speaking fanfiction community. Furthermore, the selection of fanfictions in languages other than English allows for the exploration of diverse cultural perspectives. These stories not only contribute to a richer tapestry of fanfiction but also offer fresh vantage points on how Ogham is perceived and employed within distinct cultural frameworks. The examination of these narratives provides a more comprehensive understanding of the global reach and interpretive flexibility of Ogham in the realm of fanfiction. In addition to the above reasons, these three fanfictions were chosen as representative samples from the larger corpus. They showcase a range of thematic elements, character interactions, and narrative styles present within Alfredian fanfiction, ensuring a well-rounded and holistic examination of Ogham's role in this particular fandom. The rationale for selecting these case studies is thus partly rooted in their exemplification of prominent tropes within the Alfredian fanfiction genre. By selecting these specific fanfictions for analysis, this article aims to delve deeply into the intricate relationship between Ogham and Alfredian fanfiction, demonstrating how this ancient script contributes to the creation of novel meanings while simultaneously embracing linguistic and cultural diversity within fan-created narratives.

Alfredian fanfiction, like much of contemporary fan-created content, predominantly circulates in the dynamic and sometimes ephemeral spaces of the internet. Given the transient nature of online content, this article adopts a proactive approach to preservation. Copies of the selected fanfictions are securely archived on a dedicated domain to ensure their stability over time, solidifying their place in the digital landscape. This approach recognizes the importance of safeguarding these fan-created works for future analysis and research, acknowledging the role of these narratives in the ongoing discourse of historical reinterpretation and creative expression.

4. Ogham

Ogham, an early medieval alphabet predominantly employed to transcribe the early Irish language (O'Kelly and O'Kelly 1989), occupies a distinctive position in the realm of historical scripts. Characterised by a series of horizontal or

diagonal lines and notches inscribed onto the edges of standing stones, Ogham offers a unique form of written expression, often running from left to right (Macalister 2014 [1937]). As noted by Damian McManus (1986: 6), "the use of the written word at the time in question was not as common or as widespread as it is today, and the orthography was more fluid and changeable than is that of Modern English". Although Ogham finds its primary association with early Irish linguistic traditions, Ogham's historical journey is marked by intriguing twists and turns, revealing a rich tapestry of cultural and linguistic evolution. Ogham's origins are intertwined with the ancient practices of Celtic divination, in which patterns formed by sticks thrown upon the ground were interpreted as messages from the Otherworld. This system of divination gradually evolved into a script employed for inscribing messages on stone monuments. Ogham's versatility is reflected in its multifaceted use, ranging from marking territorial boundaries to recording personal names and commemorating the deceased (McManus 1988). The earliest extant Ogham inscriptions trace their roots back to the 4th century CE, providing a tantalising glimpse into the script's historical timeline. Notably, Ogham continued to be used in Ireland and Scotland until the 8th or 9th century CE, underscoring its enduring legacy (O'Kelly and O'Kelly 1989). This persistence, however, eventually yielded to the dominance of the Latin alphabet following the Christianization of Ireland in the 5th century. Despite this transition, Ogham maintained a sporadic presence in various contexts for several centuries, hinting at its cultural resilience and adaptability.

Beyond its historical role, Ogham holds a symbolic significance deeply intertwined with Irish identity and heritage. Its enduring appeal transcends mere historical interest, with Ogham finding expression in various artistic and cultural contexts throughout the centuries. As a symbol of cultural pride, Ogham continues to captivate contemporary imaginations, serving as a bridge between ancient traditions and modern interpretations. Scholarly inquiry into Ogham is not without its challenges. The corpus of Ogham inscriptions presents a complex puzzle, with questions surrounding the linguistic affiliations of Pictish language(s) posing particular challenges (Forsyth 1998, 2000, 2006). While some assert that these inscriptions predominantly represent non-Celtic or even non-Indo-European languages, others contend that certain inscriptions should be construed as Gaelic, while others are attributed to the Brittonic language group (Rodway 2020). This debate reflects the intricate nature of Ogham's linguistic heritage, as scholars grapple with the elusive meanings of these ancient inscriptions. Ogham stands as a testament to the intertwined evolution of script, language, and culture. Its journey from a divinatory tool to a written script, its enduring usage, and its symbolic significance underscore its enduring relevance. While challenges persist in interpreting certain inscriptions, the allure of Ogham as a unique form of expression remains undiminished, serving as a bridge

connecting us to the rich tapestry of Ireland's cultural and linguistic heritage. A clear indicator of how Ogham transcends media, countries, and centuries is its presence in 21st -century arts and crafts. One way in which Ogham has been incorporated into modern-day art is through tattoos. Many people today choose to get Ogham tattoos as a way of connecting with their Celtic heritage or as a symbol of their love for Ireland. Ogham tattoos often feature a person's name or a meaningful phrase translated into the Ogham script and written in a stylized manner. In addition to tattoos, Ogham is also featured in modern artwork and graphic design. For example, artists might create illustrations or digital designs that incorporate the Ogham alphabet in a creative and visually striking way. Some artists might also use Ogham-inspired patterns or motifs in their designs, such as knotwork or spirals, which are often associated with Celtic art. Ogham also appears in contemporary literature and storytelling. For example, writers might create stories or poems that incorporate the Ogham alphabet or draw on Celtic mythology and folklore. Similarly, artists might create their own interpretations of Celtic legends or characters and include the Ogham alphabet as a way of adding authenticity or depth to their creations. Strongly inspired by Romantic representations of a Celtic past, creative people are constantly creating new drawings and stories on the internet, in which the Ogham alphabet plays a role. A large part of this practice takes place in the realms of fan works.

One of the ways in which Ogham is used in contemporary fan works is to create a sense of authenticity and historical continuity. By using Ogham in this way, artists create a sense of depth and richness to the show's mythology, evoking the idea of an ancient and mysterious culture. Another way in which Ogham is used in contemporary fannish creations is to express cultural pride and identity. For many Irish people, Ogham is a symbol of their unique linguistic and cultural heritage, and using it in fan works is a way to celebrate and honour that heritage. In this sense, Ogham becomes a tool for cultural preservation and resistance against the homogenising forces of globalisation. At the same time, Ogham's presence in contemporary fan works also creates new meanings and traditions. By using Ogham in unexpected ways, artists are able to reinterpret and reimagine its significance. For example, in some fanart, Ogham is used to spell out modern words and phrases, subverting its traditional association with ancient history and instead using it to create a playful and irreverent tone. In addition, Ogham's presence in contemporary fan works creates new opportunities for dialogue and exchange between cultures. As Ogham is increasingly used in non-Irish contexts, it becomes a bridge between different cultural traditions, sparking conversations and exchanges that may not have occurred otherwise. While Ogham's origins, purpose, and meanings continue to be subjects of scholarly debate and interpretation, its adoption by modern neo-pagan and New Age communities has contributed to a rich tapestry of interpretations that may diverge from its original

use as a writing system. In the context of fanfiction and other contemporary creative works, Ogham's associations with magic, divination, and mystical symbolism likely contribute to its allure. The ambiguity and mystique surrounding Ogham can add depth and intrigue to narratives, as it taps into a sense of ancient wisdom and mysticism that resonates with both creators and audiences. For example, the word "ura" and its associations with passion on some neo-pagan websites illustrate how contemporary interpretations may differ from historical ones. Such variations are part of the ongoing dialogue and reinterpretation of Ogham's meanings.

5. Alfredian fanfiction

Alfredian fanfiction falls into the realm of online intertextual storytelling, a form of narrative creation and sharing that takes place in digital spaces, particularly on the internet. It involves the use of existing texts, often from various sources such as books, movies, TV shows, or other media, as reference points or source material to create new narratives or stories. In this context, "intertextual" signifies the relationship between these new narratives and the pre-existing texts they draw upon. Creators in online intertextual storytelling remix and reinterpret elements from existing texts. They may take characters, settings, plotlines, or themes from original works and put their own creative spin on them. Online intertextual storytelling often involves a community of creators and consumers who actively engage with and contribute to the narrative. This can include fanfiction, fan art, fan videos, and collaborative storytelling projects. These narratives are typically shared and distributed through digital platforms and online communities. Popular platforms include fanfiction websites, social media, and forums dedicated to specific fandoms. Online intertextual storytelling is closely tied to fan culture. Fans of a particular media franchise or work often engage in this type of storytelling as a way to express their love for, critique, or expand upon the original content. In some cases, online intertextual storytelling may extend across multiple media forms, creating a transmedia narrative experience. This can include fan-created websites, podcasts, or even alternate reality games that add layers to the story. Online intertextual storytelling, such as for example in Alfredian fanfiction, is a dynamic and participatory form of narrative creation that leverages the internet's collaborative nature to reinterpret and expand upon existing narratives, often within specific fandom communities. It's a creative and interactive way for fans and creators to engage with their favourite stories and characters while contributing their own unique perspectives and narratives to the larger cultural conversation.

Alfredian fanfiction centres on the reimagining of the historical figure of King Alfred, the king of Wessex from 871 to 899 CE, who is renowned for his defence

of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of southern England against the Danes, and his epithet "the Great" reflects his accomplishments. He was the first king of Wessex to call himself "King of the Anglo-Saxons" and was recognized as a learned man who encouraged education, improved the legal system, and reorganised the military structure of his kingdom (King 2018). Alfred's piety has led to his association with the biblical King David, as well as to his veneration as a saint in some Catholic traditions, although he was never officially canonised (Taaffe 1907). Throughout history, Alfred has served as a mirror of the Zeitgeist, the defining spirit or mood of the particular period in which he was written about, inspiring people to great accomplishments (Parker 2007). This tradition of storytelling surrounding Alfred the Great has been coined "Alfredism" by Barbara Yorke (2017) to describe the reputation and public image of King Alfred from the post-Conquest period to the present day. Many entertaining tales have emerged about King Alfred, such as his disguise as a minstrel to infiltrate a Danish camp or as a kitchen boy to a Saxon housewife, where he may or may not have burned some cakes.

Fanfiction narratives developing around a fictionalised Alfred are mostly based on his character in the Netflix series The Last Kingdom, which is a historical drama set in the late 9th century. In this fanfiction, creative fans rewrite stories about King Alfred in a way that reinterprets his character and his historical context. Fanfiction often takes the form of intertextual storytelling, in which various elements from different sources are combined to create a new narrative. In the case of Alfredian fanfiction, this new narrative aims to present a version of Alfred that resonates with contemporary audiences and speaks to their private as well as political concerns, for example by having the king approve acts of bisexuality (Mussies 2019) or make a case against Brexit (Mussies 2021b). Most of the fanfiction featuring King Alfred is politically left, progressive and feminist (Mussies 2021a). As a reaction to this, the corpus sporadically provokes extreme right-wing comments or even rewritings (Mussies 2022). A surprising recurring element in Alfredian fanfiction is the use of Ogham.

The exploration of Ogham within Alfredian fanfiction holds paramount importance as it signifies a cultural crossroads where historical narratives intermingle with contemporary fan creativity. This engagement with Ogham, an ancient script deeply rooted in Celtic heritage, adds layers of cultural authenticity and resonant context to these narratives. Ogham's inclusion also bears symbolic significance, serving as a marker of cultural pride and recognition within fan communities. Moreover, Ogham's distinctive visual characteristics evoke a sense of mystique and historical depth, enriching the immersive quality of the narratives. Importantly, this exploration encourages novel interpretations of historical scripts and artefacts, illustrating the dynamic nature of cultural heritage in the context of modern storytelling. Ultimately, the integration of Ogham in Alfredian fanfiction facilitates a dialogue between the past and the present,

showcasing how historical scripts continue to inspire and shape contemporary cultural expressions in the digital age.

6. Technical Adaptations of Ogham in Alfredian Fanfiction

The utilisation of Ogham within the realm of Alfredian fanfiction constitutes a multifaceted phenomenon that involves technical adaptations spanning various modes of representation. This section aims to dissect the technical strategies employed by authors to incorporate Ogham into their works, ranging from Unicode-encoded characters to visual images and textual approximations. In the contemporary digital landscape, Unicode has emerged as a standardised system for encoding characters from various writing systems, allowing for cross-platform compatibility and consistent rendering. Authors of fanfiction often deploy Unicode-encoded Ogham characters, drawn from the Unicode block specifically designated for representing Primitive Irish language inscriptions as codified in the Ogham script. The integration of these characters into the textual fabric of fanfiction narratives serves the dual purpose of historical authenticity and accessible digital communication. By employing Unicode, authors signify their commitment to preserving the historical integrity of Ogham while harnessing the capabilities of modern technology to disseminate their narratives.

The incorporation of digital images depicting Ogham inscriptions stands as another pivotal technique within Alfredian fanfiction. Authors draw upon the expansive resources available on the internet, accessing images that range from photographs of Ogham inscriptions sourced from repositories like Wikipedia to digitally created renditions generated using tools such as graphic design software. These images serve as multimodal supplements that augment the textual narrative, imbuing it with visual authenticity and encouraging reader engagement. The juxtaposition of textual description and visual representation invites readers to partake in the act of decoding, thereby fostering an immersive and participatory reading experience. A distinctive feature of the digital era is the convergence of diverse modes of communication within a single medium. Authors of fanfiction often employ textual approximations and digital signifiers to evoke the presence of Ogham. For instance, the use of “--/--” to replicate the linear composition of Ogham characters reflects an ingenious adaptation of the limitations of conventional keyboards to convey the essence of an ancient script. This technique not only underscores the ingenuity of fanfiction authors but also accentuates the symbiosis between historical sensibilities and contemporary technological constraints.

7. Meanings of Ogham in Alfredian Fanfiction

In Alfredian fanfiction, Ogham is used in different ways depending on the specific tropes of the story. For example, in stories that portray Alfred as a wise father or teacher, Ogham may be used to represent his knowledge and wisdom. In stories that feature healing women, Ogham may be used to represent the healing power of nature. In romantic or erotic stories, Ogham may be used to symbolise the connection between the characters and the supernatural world. Ogham is often used as a symbol of the supernatural and spiritual world of Celtic customs. In this context, Ogham might also be linked to the concept of Deus ex Machina, which means "god from the machine." This literary device refers to a sudden and unexpected event or character that comes to the rescue of the protagonist and resolves the story's conflict. Sometimes Ogham is described in detail in the stories, sometimes it is actually inserted into the story as a Unicode character or picture, and in other cases, Ogham is only hinted at or implied. An example of the latter is a rewriting of the Irish mythological tale Tochmarc Étaíne, in which Alfred takes the place of the druid Dalan. As such, in the contexts of Alfredian fanfiction, this use of Ogham seems to be very similar to the insertion of other symbols, for example from Judaism (Mussies 2023a), or from what seems to be Anglo-Saxon runes (comp Düwel & Nedoma 2023), as exemplified in the story "To becume þin rice" (2023) by amazinguwu.[2] Fans of the reimaginated King Alfred are crossing borders of time and space to form new traditions through reiterating as well as changing elements of the heritage of Ogham. Overall, 21st-century internet culture is revitalising and creating new meanings for this early medieval alphabet within the tropes and subtropes of Alfredian fanfiction.

Tropes are recurring storytelling devices or motifs used in literature, film, and other forms of media. In fanfiction, tropes are often used to create familiar scenarios or plot devices that fans of a particular fandom may enjoy. A few examples of common tropes in fanfiction that are also present in the fannish reimaginations of King Alfred are AU, H/C, fix-it, lovers, time-travel and crossovers. AU means Alternate Universe. In an AU fic, the author reimagines the world of the fandom in a different way. For example, a King Alfred AU might explore what would have happened if he had never become king, or if he had made different decisions during his reign. H/C stands for Hurt/Comfort. Also known as "whump", this trope involves one character being injured or emotionally distressed, and another character coming to their aid and providing comfort. It's a popular trope in many fandoms, especially those with a lot of

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2 Found on Tumblr [deleted since]. Republished at http://martinemussies.nl/web/to-becume-thin-rice/ .

action or drama. In fanfiction featuring King Alfred, the examples of Hurt/Comfort can be divided into two subcategories. In many stories, the king is presented as an almighty comforter, which might have erotic connotations as well (Mussies 2024). In other narratives, it is the king himself who is hurt and needs to be comforted. Examples of these stories can be found in the "healing women" type (Mussies 2021a). In a Fix-It fic, the author sets out to "fix" something that happened in the canon that they didn't like. For example, as The Last Kingdom is overwhelmingly heterosexually oriented, many authors have rewritten the stories around King Alfred adding non-heterosexual storylines (Mussies 2019). The Enemies to Lovers trope involves two characters who start out as enemies, but over the course of the story, they develop romantic feelings for each other. It's a popular trope in many fandoms, especially those with a lot of romantic tension and often overlaps with the Fix-It homosexual insertions, for example in narratives in which Alfred might find himself drawn to a Viking warrior who he was previously at odds, such as in the fanfictions in which King Alfred has a sexual relationship with Uhtred of Bebbanburg. As the name suggests, in a time travel fic, one or more characters travel back or forward in time and experience events that have already happened or will happen in the future, which is the case in many (alter) ego insertions in Alfredian fanfic, in which the fans travel back in time to meet the King (and often start a romantic and/or sexual relationship with him). A crossover fic combines two or more fandoms into one story. In the case of Alfredian fanfiction, there are many narratives combining characters and other elements of The Last Kingdom and Vikings, for example by pairing King Alfred with Viking queen Lagertha or with princess Gisla.

Subtropes are more specific variations of a broader trope, which can add more nuance and complexity to the storytelling. They are often used to further categorise fanfiction and can be helpful for readers looking for a particular type of story within a broader trope. For example, the Enemies to Lovers trope has several subtropes, including Forced Proximity (two characters who are forced to spend time together, often in a confined space, which leads to them developing romantic feelings for each other), Slow Burn (a gradual build-up of romantic tension between two characters over a long period of time, which can create a satisfying payoff when they finally get together), and Mutual Pining (two characters who are secretly in love with each other but are afraid to admit their feelings). The main difference between a trope and a subtrope is the level of specificity. Tropes are broader storytelling devices that can apply to many different stories and fandoms, while subtropes are more specific variations of those broader tropes that add more nuance to the storytelling. Ogham is used in three different subtropes of Alfredian fanfiction: Alfred as the wise father/teacher, the healing women in an Alfredian context, and the (alter) ego-inserting romantic/erotic stories. In the trope of Alfred as the wise father/teacher,

Ogham is often used as a tool to impart wisdom and guidance to the characters. For example, in the fanfiction "Alfred's Legacy" by Yonit Mishor, Alfred teaches his son Edward the meaning of the Ogham symbol "ura," which – according to the fan text – represents patience and endurance (whereas various pagan websites cite it as meaning passion). Edward later uses this knowledge to overcome a difficult challenge, showing the importance of learning from the wisdom of one's elders.[3] Our first case study "Learning from the past" by TheAncientScribe is an example of this first subtrope. In the healing women trope, Ogham is often used to represent the connection between the physical and spiritual realms. In the fanfiction "The Medicine Woman" by Lady_Dora, the protagonist Aethelflaed uses Ogham to communicate with the spirits of nature and learn about the healing properties of plants. In one scene, she recites the Ogham symbol "Beth" while harvesting a particular plant, which is said to have powerful healing properties.[4] Our second case study "An Rí Cogaidh agus an Sagart Gaelach: Scéal Grá na Máighdean Íseal faoi Mhágic Ogham" is another example of this subtrope. In the ego-inserting romantic/erotic stories trope, Ogham is often used to add a sense of mystery and otherworldliness to the romantic encounters between characters. In the fanfiction "The Ogham Bride" by Fenris_Wolf, the protagonist Lady Eadgyth discovers a mysterious Ogham inscription on a tree in the forest. She later meets a mysterious man, who introduces himself as Bivaidonas, son of the tribe Cunava, but turns out to be King Alfred. He teaches her the meaning of the symbol, which leads to a passionate and mysterious romantic encounter. Our third case study "Alfred y Abigail: Dos secretos" by corasketches is an example of this subtrope. In all of these examples, Ogham serves as a powerful tool for evoking a sense of ancient wisdom, mysticism and spirituality in the world of Alfredian fanfiction. Whether used to impart knowledge, connect with the spiritual realm, or add mystery to romantic encounters, Ogham is a versatile and evocative symbol that adds depth and meaning to the intertextual storytelling around King Alfred and his world.

8. Case study 1: "Learning from the past" by TheAncientScribe[5]

The first case study is entitled "Learning from the past" and published under the pseudonym of TheAncientScribe. It is a work of fanfiction that highlights the value of curiosity, learning, and the pursuit of knowledge. The story is about a non-canonical character named Baddo. Historically, this might be inspired by Queen Baddo (also known as Bauda), a 6th-century Visigoth queen consort, who

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3 Republished at http://martinemussies.nl/web/alfreds-legacy/
4 Republished at http://martinemussies.nl/web/the-medicine-woman/
5 Republished at http://martinemussies.nl/web/learning-from-the-past/

was married to King Reccared the First (Mussies 2023b). Baddo is the only Visigoth queen consort to have autographed sanctioned state and church documents, implying her involvement in politics and her authority over the government. Baddo's lineage was first written about by Isidore of Seville, who attests to the fact that Liuva II, born in 583 or 584, had a commoner mother who was one of Reccared's concubines. Many scholars believe that the mother of Liuva II was queen Baddo, making her the only known Visigoth queen consort to bear a royal son. Her influence over politics and the government cannot be ignored.

In the fanfiction narrative, Baddo approaches King Alfred and shows him the stone with strange markings on it that she found in the forest. This action demonstrates Baddo's curiosity and intelligence, as well as her eagerness to learn new things. King Alfred is impressed by her passion for learning and agrees to teach her Ogham, which indicates that he values and supports education. As they sit in the royal library, King Alfred patiently teaches Baddo about the Ogham alphabet, providing specific examples such as the meanings of three of the runic letters:

ᚁ is Beith and means birch,
ᚃ is sail, meaning willow,
ᚇ is ruis, for the colour red…

This is an example of King Alfred's knowledge and expertise in the subject, as well as his willingness to share that knowledge with others. Baddo's fascination with the intricacies of the Ogham alphabet and her eagerness to learn are highlighted in this section, as she asks many questions and practices writing the letters. She quickly becomes skilled at writing Ogham and is grateful for King Alfred's guidance and knowledge, which shows her respect for him as a teacher and mentor.

"Learning from the past" reflects the cultural importance of literacy and education in Anglo-Saxon society, as well as the value placed on curiosity and exploration. Baddo's desire to learn about the Ogham alphabet is presented as a positive trait, and her journey to seek knowledge is portrayed as an adventure filled with obstacles to overcome. The story presents King Alfred as a wise and knowledgeable ruler who values education and is willing to share his knowledge with others. This reflects the historical reputation of King Alfred as a patron of learning and literacy. The use of the Ogham alphabet, an ancient Irish alphabet, in the story is an interesting choice. While the Ogham alphabet was used to write Old Irish, it was not used in Anglo-Saxon England, where the Latin alphabet was used. However, the use of the Ogham alphabet in the story adds an element of mystery and exoticism to the tale.

Overall, the story of Baddo is a well-crafted work of fiction that highlights the importance of curiosity, learning, and the pursuit of knowledge, while also

reflecting cultural values and historical figures. In addition, this story exemplifies the trope. The theme of a young, beautiful girl learning runes from the scholar King Alfred recurs in many stories. For illustration, "The Redheaded Artist and the King's Lessons" by Scarlett Inkwell is another example, with a very similar narrative. In this story, King Alfred teaches an original character by the name of Maeve the Ogham alphabet along with the Anglo-Saxon Runes as part of her education. This serves to deepen her understanding of ancient languages and writing systems, as well as to emphasise the importance of written communication in history. The inclusion of the Ogham alphabet specifically adds a Celtic element to the story, which helps to expand the cultural scope beyond just Anglo-Saxon England. This is also reflected in the red hair and the name of the female protagonist: Maeve (sometimes spelled Maebh or Medb) is of Irish origin. The name is derived from the Gaelic word "Medb," which means "intoxicating" or "intoxicated." Just like Baddo, Maeve has mythical/historical connotations, as Maeve is typically associated with the legendary queen of Connacht in Irish mythology, Queen Maeve. In Irish mythology, Queen Maeve was a powerful and charismatic figure who was known for her beauty, intelligence, and warrior-like qualities. She was a fierce and independent ruler who was determined to assert her dominance over the men in her kingdom. Her story has inspired many works of literature and art, and her name has become associated with strength, beauty, and feminine power. In the context of the story, the name Maeve serves to underscore the protagonist's artistic and creative qualities, as well as her strong and independent spirit, in a similar way as the name Baddo in "Learning from the past".

9. Case study 2: "An Rí Cogaidh agus an Sagart Gaelach: Scéal Grá na Máighdean Íseal faoi Mhágic Ogham" by Aisling O'Malley[6]

The second case study under consideration is a work written in the Irish language. Its title, An Rí Cogaidh agus an Sagart Gaelach: Scéal Grá na Máighdean Íseal faoi Mhágic Ogham, can be translated as "The War King and the Gaelic Priest: A Love Story about a Low Virgin under Ogham Magic." It is worth noting that the translation of the term "Mhágic" may require further examination, as it deviates from the more commonly used Irish term "draíocht" for magic. Additionally, the word "maighdean" presents an interesting linguistic challenge as it can be translated as both "maiden" and "virgin" within the Irish language, as seen in phrases -An Mhaighdean Mhuire (The Virgin Mary) And -Maighdean óg (Young Maiden). The choice of "virgin" is inferred from the contextual

[6] Republished at http://martinemussies.nl/web/an-ri-cogaidh-agus-an-sagart-gaelach-sceal-gra-na-maighdean-iseal-faoi-mhagic-ogham/

description, which portrays the character as a nun. The idea of a "low" virgin might suggest that she is gentle and modest. This ambiguity in translation underscores the complexity of language and cultural nuances within the Irish context. Furthermore, it raises questions about the translator's choice and the potential impact on the interpretation of the text.

This narrative explores the relationship between King Alfred of Wessex and the nun Modwen, following the 'slow burn' subtrope of the Enemies to Lovers trope. The name Modwen/Modwenne/Modwenna occurs more often in Alfredian fanfiction (Mussies 2021a). It is predominantly associated with Ireland, and there are many connections between King Alfred and Ireland (Wehlau 2011). For example, some historical accounts suggest that King Alfred received a substantial portion of his education during his sickly childhood and early youth in Ireland. According to Mooney's A History of Ireland (1853), during this period, the young king was sent to a religious lady named Modwenna in Ireland for healing when he fell ill. It is worth noting that Modwenna was also the name of a seventh-century nun and saint in England who founded Burton Abbey in Staffordshire and was revered for performing holy miracles. It has been reported that Modwenna sought King Alfred's assistance when her abbey was in danger of collapsing.

The narrative is set during the Viking invasions of England, and the king seeks to learn the Ogham alphabet to communicate with his allies secretly. Modwen is a skilled scribe who teaches him the Ogham alphabet, and over time, the two develop a deep affection for each other that transcends their differences in social status and worldview. The story portrays a transformational journey for both Alfred and Modwen. Alfred, who initially sees Modwen as weak and superstitious, gradually recognizes her inner strength and intelligence. He also discovers a deep spiritual connection to the Ogham alphabet, which Modwen teaches him to use for mystical purposes. Modwen, on the other hand, learns to assert herself and express her feelings, ultimately making the first move in their relationship. Thus, this story's central theme is the transformative power of love, which can overcome social and cultural barriers and transform individuals' perspectives. The story also suggests that the Ogham alphabet has mystical properties that can be used for spiritual purposes, highlighting the importance of ancient knowledge and traditions. The story is written in a narrative style, with vivid descriptions of characters, settings, and events. The characters' inner thoughts and feelings are revealed through their actions and interactions, creating a nuanced and complex portrayal of their relationship.

A close-reading of this fanfiction reveals an interesting facet regarding the author's proficiency in the Irish language. It appears that the author may not be a native speaker or writer of Irish, as evidenced by certain linguistic choices and deviations from standard Irish terminology. This observation bears significance

for the fanfiction itself. The nuances of a language, particularly in a literary context, can significantly impact the authenticity and resonance of a narrative. When an author utilises a language not native to them, it can introduce idiosyncrasies and inaccuracies that might not align with the expectations of fluent speakers and readers. This is exemplified in the following passage:

Bhí sí freisin ina scríobhaí cumasach a bhí tar éis bheith toilteanach teangaog Ogham a mhúineadh do Alfred, a bhí ag súil úsáid a bhaint as an ngéagaog seo le cumarsáid rúnda a dhéanamh lena chairde. [She was also a talented scribe that was willing to (speak Ogham to?) teach Alfred the Ogham language, he hoped to use this language to communicate secretly with his friends]

The story is in a strangely non-standard Irish. Perhaps the author is a student of Irish, and the use of translation software or AI cannot be ruled out (Mussies 2023c). Especially the use of the word "teangaog" and "ngéagaog" in the original translation raise questions about linguistic accuracy. Teangaog is not an Irish word, it might be a typo from 'teanga' ('tongue, language') combined with the "og" from Ogham. The word "ngéagaog" (properly cited as "[g]éagaog") is also not a commonly used word for language in the Irish language, that would typically use the word "teanga". Such linguistic deviations might affect the reception and interpretation of the fanfiction among those familiar with the Irish language. In the fragment cited, it is unclear whether it is about 'willing to speak Ogham' and/or 'willing to teach the Ogham language', as 'a bhí tar éis bheith' is past perfect.[7] Native speakers and enthusiasts may be sensitive to these departures from linguistic conventions, potentially influencing their overall assessment of the work's authenticity and cultural resonance.[8] Additionally, it prompts discussions about the motivations and intentions of the author in choosing to write in Irish and the impact of these choices on the narrative's portrayal of Irish culture and language.

Still, the narrative itself holds considerable appeal and interest. Initially, the Ogham only represents a practical tool for communication for King Alfred, as he "hoped to use this language to communicate secretly with his friends". This resonates with theories by academics like Carney (1975) and MacNeill (2014 [1931]), who claim that Ogham was initially developed by Irish scholars or druids for political, military, or religious purposes as a cryptic alphabet that was intended to be impenetrable to those who only read Latin alphabet. But the fanfiction employs the Ogham alphabet as symbolism to convey deeper meanings and themes. In the narrative, Alfred learns from Modwenna that the letters can also

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7 The author is very grateful to the anonymous peer reviewer who pointed this out.

8 An alternative phrasing of the section might be "Ba scríobhaí cumasach í freisin a bhí sásta ogham a labhairt (or: "(an) teanga ogham a mhúineadh") chun an teanga a mhúineadh do Alfred, Bhí súil aige an teanga seo a úsáid chun cumarsáid rúnda a dhéanamh lena chairde".

be used as a means of invoking and channelling energy to effect change in the world. The gentle nun uses the Ogham letters in a way that symbolises the power of spiritual practices and the ability to tap into forces beyond the physical world. So Alfred learns and discovers its mystical properties and its potential for spiritual growth and enlightenment. His journey with Modwen represents a shift in his worldview from a strictly practical, materialistic perspective to a more spiritual one. Additionally, the Ogham serves as a symbol of the connection between Alfred and Modwen. They share a common language and a common purpose in their study of the Ogham, and it becomes a source of bonding and intimacy between them. As such, the use of the Ogham alphabet in this story is twofold. First, it represents the idea that there is more to life than the physical realm and that spiritual practices can lead to personal growth and enlightenment. Secondly, it also represents the power of language and communication in forming connections and fostering intimacy between people.

Despite deviations from standard Irish language usage and potential indications of non-native authorship, the story woven by Aisling O'Malley is captivating and thought-provoking. The thematic exploration of a love story involving a war king, a Gaelic priest, and a low-ranking virgin under the enigmatic influence of Ogham magic provides an intriguing backdrop. The narrative engages readers through its exploration of complex characters and their interactions, delving into themes of love, secrecy, and the interplay between Irish folklore and history. Furthermore, the narrative's allure lies in its ability to transcend linguistic intricacies. While language authenticity is undeniably important in the portrayal of Irish culture and heritage, the story's compelling plot, character development, and the interplay of historical and mythological elements offer readers a rich and immersive experience.

10. Case study 3: "Alfred y Abigail: Dos secretos" by corasketches[9]

The third case study is written in Spanish and features a non-canonical character by the name of Abigail. With the risk of ' reading into the text', in the context of Alfredian fanfiction, I think that this name was not selected arbitrarily (see also Mussies 2023a). Given its etymological roots, the name "Abigail" probably holds a deliberate significance. Originating from the Hebrew term "ab," denoting "father," and the Hebrew root "g-y-l," signifying "to rejoice," the name Abigail presents a range of potential interpretations, encompassing "the delight of my father" and "a wellspring of joy." In Biblical terms, Abigail is a woman who appears in the First Book of Samuel. She was the wife of Nabal, a wealthy but harsh man who insulted David, who at the time was fleeing from King Saul.

9 Republished at http://martinemussies.nl/web/alfred-y-abigail-dos-secretos/

Abigail, who was wise and beautiful, interceded on David's behalf and prevented him from taking revenge on her husband. After Nabal's death, David married Abigail. This reinforces the connection of King Alfred to King David. The narrative follows the main character, Alfred, who is studying history and geography with Abigail under the tutelage of Father Godwin. Alfred finds Abigail's smile warm and captivating and struggles to maintain his composure in her presence. During one of their study sessions, Alfred feigns illness to take a break from their studies and Father Godwin suggests they take a walk outside. Abigail and Alfred take a walk in the castle gardens where Abigail shows Alfred a secret spot. The story ends with Alfred correcting Abigail for addressing him as "my lord" and asking her to call him by his name. The story's main theme appears to be Alfred's infatuation with Abigail, evident in his descriptions of her physical attributes, particularly her smile. The author uses vivid imagery to convey Alfred's admiration for Abigail's beauty and grace. The story also touches on the class difference between Alfred and Abigail, as she addresses him as "my lord," indicating her inferior social status. The author employs simple language, making the story easy to follow, and the dialogue is natural and believable. The story lacks a clear conflict or resolution, but it serves as a character study of Alfred, as the author seems to focus on Alfred's internal struggle and his inability to express his feelings for Abigail. Using effective imagery and characterization to convey Alfred's feelings for Abigail, this story provides an insightful glimpse into Alfred's character and his emotional state.

The word Ogham is mentioned once in this story, in the line "Son piedras Ogham y se usan para predecir el futuro", which translates to "These are Ogham stones and they are used to predict the future." This use of Ogham stones for divination suggests a connection to ancient Celtic mysticism or folklore. The practice of using Ogham for divination is not uncommon in modern neo-pagan and New Age spiritual traditions that draw inspiration from Celtic spirituality. In the following section of this fanfiction, Abigail explains more about the Ogham stones to Alfred, and tells him how they are used to predict the future. She reveals that she learned how to use them from Saskia, a woman who used to live with her father when she was a child. Abigail tells Alfred that she found the stones in Saskia's room when she was younger, and that Saskia promised to teach her how to use them when she grew up. She also explains that the stones predicted that Alfred will become a king and that a significant event will break the line of his brother's life, which she believes means that he will die. The fact that Abigail is using Ogham stones to predict the future suggests that she is knowledgeable about traditional folklore and practices. This detail also adds to the sense of mystery and magic of this fanfiction. Abigail's story about Saskia, the woman who lived with her father, also adds to the intrigue of the narrative. It raises questions about why Saskia was a prisoner, how she earned Abigail's father's trust, and what

happened to her. The fact that Saskia taught Abigail how to use the Ogham stones implies that she was knowledgeable about the supernatural and may have had a mystical or magical quality herself. Overall, the addition of Ogham to the story adds depth by introducing a mystical element and providing some backstory for Abigail. It also raises questions and hints at the possibility of further revelations later in the narrative.

11. Reflections

In analysing the three case studies, a consistent thematic undercurrent emerges - the Ogham alphabet serves as a potent symbol within the narratives, embodying mystery, ancient wisdom, and a connection to the spiritual or supernatural dimensions of the stories. This recurring motif manifests despite the historical disconnect between the Ogham script and the fanfiction's settings. It is precisely this historical incongruity that adds a layer of depth and intrigue to the narratives, as the Ogham script becomes a bridge between the contemporary fanfiction worlds and the age-old, enigmatic Celtic traditions. In each case, the Ogham script acts as a literary vehicle that transcends its historical context, seamlessly integrating itself into the stories' fabric. Furthermore, these case studies collectively underscore several profound implications for the revitalization of Ogham as a cultural and literary element. Firstly, they demonstrate the remarkable adaptability of this ancient script within modern creative contexts. The fact that fanfiction authors can employ Ogham to symbolise deeper layers of meaning, spiritual growth, and interpersonal connections is a testament to the script's enduring relevance. It highlights the script's versatility as a narrative device, capable of morphing to suit contemporary storytelling needs while preserving its core aura of mysticism and wisdom. Secondly, these case studies emphasise that Ogham's revitalization extends beyond mere historical rediscovery. It showcases Ogham's capacity to thrive in new cultural spaces, particularly within the realm of digital fan culture. This not only introduces a wider audience to Ogham but also reinforces its significance within contemporary storytelling practices. Ogham's presence in fanfiction aligns with broader trends in cultural revitalization, where ancient symbols and traditions are repurposed to resonate with modern sensibilities. In conclusion, these case studies collectively draw attention to the enduring adaptability and richness of Ogham as a literary device. They shed light on its capacity to transcend historical confines, infusing narratives with a sense of depth and intrigue. Moreover, they underscore the ongoing cultural significance of Ogham by demonstrating its capacity to find a place within modern storytelling practices, particularly in digital fan culture. In essence, Ogham's revitalization is not just a journey into the past; it is a dynamic evolution that reimagines its role in contemporary cultural landscapes.

These three examples of Ogham in fanfiction unveil the versatility of this ancient Irish alphabet in storytelling. Whether used as a tool for education, a symbol for spiritual growth and connection, or a means of divination, Ogham adds an element of mystery and intrigue to the narratives in which it is featured. This is exemplary for other examples of the corpus of Alfredian fanfiction in which Ogham plays a role. In "The Message" by K.A. Storm, King Alfred uses Ogham to communicate with a saint. This use of Ogham is interesting because it reflects the reality of early medieval communication across linguistic boundaries. In this story, Alfred is seeking guidance from a saint, but the saint speaks a language that Alfred does not understand. To overcome this language barrier, Alfred carves his message into a piece of wood using Ogham. The saint is then able to read the message, understand Alfred's request, and provide guidance in return. Another example is "The Secret of the Stone" by Byrne, in which an Ogham inscription on a stone leads Alfred to a hidden treasure. In this story, Alfred comes across an old stone with an Ogham inscription on it. Using his knowledge of Ogham, he is able to translate the inscription, which leads him to a hidden treasure. This use of Ogham reflects the important role that inscriptions played in early medieval culture. Inscriptions on stones and other objects were used for a variety of purposes, including marking boundaries, commemorating individuals, and recording important events. Next to these examples, there are many instances in which Ogham is used in a romantic context to express love and devotion. This use of Ogham reflects the importance of language and literature in expressing emotion and connecting with others. The use of Ogham in Alfredian fanfiction highlights the role that cultural traditions and customs play in romantic relationships. Ogham was not commonly used in Anglo-Saxon England, so its use in this story reflects a blending of cultural traditions and an appreciation for the richness and diversity of different cultural practices. Additionally, the use of Ogham adds a layer of depth and complexity to the story, emphasising the importance of language and literacy in early medieval culture. The use of Ogham in these new stories adds depth and complexity to the characters and the world they inhabit, emphasising the importance of language and literacy in shaping cultural traditions and connecting with others.

When comparing the use of Ogham in Alfredian fanfiction which attestations in other fandoms, several differences are noticeable. Take for example Part 17, "Whispers", of the ongoing Game of Thrones fanfiction "Fire and Ice: A Song of Love and Adventure", in which an author under the pseudonym of "WesterosWanderer" mentions Ogham as well.[10] "Fire and Ice: A Song of Love and Adventure" is steeped in tropes characteristic of epic romance and adventure narratives. It intertwines the lives of Jon Snow and Daenerys Targaryen, two

10 Republished at http://martinemussies.nl/web/whispers/

central characters from the Game of Thrones universe, who are depicted as unlikely yet destined lovers. The fanfiction employs the trope of destined love, a narrative device where two characters, often from contrasting backgrounds or opposing sides, are predestined to fall in love. In this case, Jon Snow and Daenerys Targaryen's union is portrayed as a profound and fated connection. Adventure is closely linked with romance in this fanfiction. The characters' love story unfolds against the backdrop of daring escapades and trials, emphasising their courage and resilience. The narrative backdrop of a chaotic and politically intricate Westeros provides an overarching trope. The contrast between the realm's turmoil and the protagonists' love highlights the redemptive and transcendent power of their relationship. In this fanfiction, Ogham is introduced as an element of historical mystique. Jon Snow references an ancient scroll written in the enigmatic Ogham script, attributing it to the theme of enduring love and fortitude. Ogham, with its distinctively carved lines and notches, is presented as a symbol of timeless wisdom and heritage. Ogham symbolises ancient wisdom and mysticism, creating an aura of historical authenticity within the narrative. It is emblematic of the enduring power of love amidst the temporal chaos of Westeros. The mention of Ogham foreshadows the strength of Jon and Daenerys's love, suggesting that it is a force capable of transcending adversity. It anticipates their unwavering commitment and shared destiny. Ogham contributes to the cultural richness of the narrative, emphasising the diverse linguistic and historical elements within the Game of Thrones world. When compared to the Alfredian fanfictions above, it is evident that Game of Thrones fanfiction uses tropes to create an epic love story within a well-established fictional universe, whereas Alfredian fanfiction similarly employs tropes to reimagine the historical figure of Alfred the Great. However, the use of Ogham in Alfredian fanfiction differs significantly. Alfredian fanfiction employs Ogham as a means to revitalise and reinterpret historical scripts, often using it to evoke a sense of mystique and spirituality. Unlike Game of Thrones fanfiction, which exists within a fantasy world, Alfredian fanfiction grounds its narratives in historical and cultural contexts. Additionally, Alfredian fanfiction is often centred on historical believability and the exploration of Alfred's life and era.

12. Conclusions

This article embarks on a journey to unravel the intricate relationship between Ogham, an Early Medieval script used primarily to write the early Irish language, and 21st-century internet culture, as manifested in Alfredian fanfiction. By examining three selected case studies, I aimed to unearth how Ogham's incorporation into contemporary narratives generates novel meanings and breathes new life into this ancient alphabet. The deliberate choice to concentrate

on these specific case studies within Alfredian fanfiction is driven by the aspiration to provide an in-depth and contextualised examination of Ogham's role in generating new meanings. It allows us to bridge historical scripts with the digital age, shedding light on how fan communities reframe cultural heritage, transcend temporal and geographical boundaries, and forge new traditions within the ever-evolving landscape of internet culture. Through a comprehensive approach, the study sought to elucidate the intricate relationship between Ogham, historical narratives, and contemporary fan creativity, providing valuable insights into how this ancient script generates novel meanings and propels the narratives forward within the digital landscape of fan culture.

While Ogham was not used in Anglo-Saxon England, it has found its way into modern works of fiction set in that time period, including Alfredian fanfiction. In this article, I have analysed three specific examples of Ogham's use in Alfredian fanfiction, exploring the literary and cultural implications of its inclusion in each story. The case studies discussed use Ogham as an element in distinct ways, to convey different purposes. "Learning from the past" uses Ogham as a tool for education and exploration, "An Rí Cogaidh agus an Sagart Gaelach: Scéal Grá na Máighdean Íseal faoi Mhágic Ogham" by Aisling O'Malley uses Ogham as a symbol for spiritual growth and connection, while "Alfred y Abigail: Dos secretos" by corasketches uses Ogham as a means of divination and adds a sense of mystery to the narrative. As exemplified by the case studies, Ogham is used as an element in various tropes and subtropes within the genre. In addition, the stories often resonate with other subtropes. For example, by the insertion of female characters from vastly different times - Baddo, Maeve, Modwen, Abigail - the authors of Alfredian fanfiction featuring Ogham also add an element of time travel to their stories. A short analysis of "Fire and Ice: A Song of Love and Adventure" from the Game of Thrones fandom highlights the employment of tropes and the utilisation of Ogham to create an epic love story set against the backdrop of a tumultuous world. Comparatively, Alfredian fanfiction employs similar tropes but utilises Ogham in distinct ways to reinvigorate historical scripts and engage with the cultural heritage of early medieval England. Both forms of fanfiction exemplify how fan authors draw upon established themes and symbols to craft narratives that resonate with contemporary audiences while paying homage to the source material.

Overall, the use of Ogham in modern-day art and media demonstrates the enduring appeal and cultural significance of this ancient script, and the ways in which it continues to inspire creativity and imagination today. The technical adaptations of Ogham within the domain of Alfredian fanfiction underscore the intricate interplay between historical heritage and modern digital expression. Through Unicode-encoded characters, visual representations, and textual approximations, authors navigate the complex terrain of historical authenticity,

multimodality, and creative adaptation. This multi-layered engagement with Ogham illustrates how fanfiction serves as a dynamic platform for the revitalization of ancient scripts, propelling them into the digital age while preserving their essence and fostering meaningful connections between past and present. The attestation of Ogham in Alfredian fanfiction however also signifies that this alphabet in 21st century art is not confined to its visual aspect; rather, it engenders new meanings that reflect the concerns and sensibilities of internet culture. Emojis, a hallmark of digital communication, share a kinship with Ogham in their capacity to convey condensed emotions and ideas. Just as emojis often transcend linguistic barriers, Ogham's visual nature allows it to communicate beyond linguistic limitations, appealing to a global audience engaged in the shared culture of the internet.

Alfredian fanfiction adapts an ancient script to a contemporary mode of expression, contributing to the creation of a novel visual language. Ogham's incorporation into Alfredian fanfiction also highlights its adaptability to the digital landscape. Hyperlinks, integral to internet culture, enable readers to access supplementary information about Ogham inscriptions and their historical context, blurring the boundaries between historical and fictional narratives. Furthermore, the act of decoding Ogham inscriptions within the context of digital media mirrors the participatory engagement that characterises internet interactions. Readers become active agents in deciphering Ogham's encoded messages, mirroring the collaborative nature of online discourse. In conclusion, the presence of Ogham in 21st-century fan works reflects the enduring power of this ancient writing system to capture the imagination and inspire creativity. By using Ogham in new and unexpected ways, artists are able to create new meanings and traditions, while also celebrating and preserving their cultural heritage. As Ogham continues to inspire and fascinate, it is likely that it will continue to play an important role in contemporary art and culture for years to come.

With this article, I hope to have made a tentative start in analysing Ogham in contemporary online fannish cultures. Of course this is only one of several avenues for future research into Ogham in contemporary culture. Other potential areas of study about the role of Ogham in digital media include video games, and social media platforms. As technology continues to advance, it will be interesting to see how Ogham is incorporated into different types of digital media and how these new mediums affect the use and interpretation of Ogham. While fan works such as fanfiction have played a significant role in popularising Ogham in contemporary culture, it would be interesting to explore how else it is used in popular media, such as music, film, and television. Another area of study is the use of Ogham in contemporary paganism and spirituality: While Ogham has historical roots in Celtic paganism, it has also been adapted by contemporary practitioners of various spiritual traditions. Future research could explore how

Ogham is used in modern pagan practices and what meanings and associations are assigned to the individual symbols. This also links to issues of Ogham and identity, as Ogham has been used by various groups to signify identity and affiliation, such as in the case of the Irish Republican Army's use of Ogham on their memorial stones. Future research could explore how Ogham is used by different communities and what meanings are associated with it.

Table 1. Attestations of Ogham in Alfredian fanfiction as of September 2023.

Title	**Author**	**Found in**	**Language**
Learning from the past	The Ancient Scribe	October 2022	English
Firefly	alhena_m35	December 2022	English
An Rí Cogaidh agus an Sagart Gaelach: Scéal Grá na Máighdean Íseal faoi Mhágic Ogham	Aisling O'Malley	January 2023	Irish
The Message	K.A. Storm	January 2023	English
The Ogham Bride	Fenris_Wolf	February 2023	English
Alfred y Abigail: Dos secretos	corasketches	February 2023	Spanish
Untitled King Alfred fanfiction	officeofbooks	February 2023	English
The Medicine Woman	Lady_Dora	March 2023	English
The Redheaded Artist and the King's Lessons	Scarlett Inkwell	March 2023	English
The Secret of the Stone	Byrne	March 2023	English
Alfred's Legacy	Yonit Mishor	March 2023	English

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LANGUAGE AND RELIGION IN TUDOR CORNWALL: THE TESTIMONY OF *SACRAMENT AN ALTER*

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ABSTRACT

This article is centred around a detailed review of D.H. Frost's new (2023) critical edition and translation of the Cornish and Latin text *Sacrament an Alter*, in both its theological/historical and its philological/linguistic aspects. First, Dr Frost's exposition of his text's remarkable background is placed against the constantly changing character of official Tudor ideology, and the ecclesiological lens through which he views his material discussed. Points from his linguistic analysis (including revivalist reconstructions) are then examined and, prompted by Frost's portrayal of the state of Cornish-language literacy in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, similarities are adduced with the known situation of near-contemporary Manx Gaelic. Traditional Cornish went into ultimately terminal decline, but Manx went on to receive both the Prayer Book and the Bible in translation; Cornwall's disadvantage in not constituting a diocese in its own right is suggested as a significant factor in the contrasting fates of the two small Celtic languages in question. Finally, attention is drawn to the potentially striking efficacy of small networks of dedicated scholars, whatever their time and place.

Keywords: Cornwall, Cornish, Latin, code-switching

Frost, D.H. 2023. *Sacrament an Alter: The Sacrament of the Altar: A critical edition with translation.* Exeter: University of Exeter Press. xi + 353 pages. ISBN: 978-1-80413-030-8

1. Introduction

The remarkable book to be evaluated here deserves full review-article treatment because it is (at least) two works in one: an exemplary exercise in the theological and ecclesiastical history of an extraordinarily turbulent period on the one hand and, on the other hand, a critical edition and translation of *Sacrament an Alter*

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(SA), a key Cornish and Latin text that bears witness, explicit and implicit, to the ideological and societal upheavals of that time. The historical component shows with new clarity how trends that were fundamentally national and even international nevertheless had a close bearing on developments that were entirely specific to a locality (in this case part of Cornwall), while the minute observation and dense explanatory annotation that accompany the critical edition render it as fine a piece of philological work as this reviewer has seen applied to any historical text in any Celtic language. I also propose and briefly conduct a "thought experiment" to investigate the striking contrast, arguably stemming from this time, between the fate of Cornish and that of traditional Manx, given the similarities of scale and cultural situation that otherwise pertained between the two linguistic communities.

If the volume has a double identity then the individual responsible for it has a quadruple one! On the theological and historical side Dr Frost is a skilled investigator, scrupulous analyst, and vastly knowledgeable expounder of his sources, and at the same time a devout Roman Catholic educator who deftly arranges his material against a background that is gently (and usually implicitly) presented as containing certain timeless truths. On the linguistic side Daveth Frost is a leading expert on the surviving writings of traditional Cornish and on how to interpret these semantically as well as linguistically in an unimpeachably scholarly fashion, and simultaneously a clear and constructive partisan of the language revival movement. When it comes to SA, so intertwined are the historical/theological and the philological/linguistic aspects that probably only Frost could have done such justice to both. Within each of these, the extent to which he has appropriately balanced the contributions of his two sub-personae is a question more open to debate. But in order to address such matters in the context of SA one first needs an awareness, at least in outline, of the chronology of the developments in Tudor national policy and practice that prompted its composition.

2. Outline chronology of relevant Tudor policy and practice[1]

From the point of view of ecclesiastical history Henry VIII, king of England from 1509-47, is probably best known for his breach with Rome: the Act of Supremacy in 1534 declared that he rather than the Pope was the head of the national Church. This move was primarily motivated by Henry's need to validate his divorce from Catherine of Aragon, which Rome had refused to sanction; but it was then used as

[1] One reason for providing such a framework here is that Frost himself seems never to do so; instead, in his modest way, he pays his readers the compliment of assuming that we have it all at our fingertips already.

cover by the king and his oligarchs for their rapacious dissolution of the realm's monastic foundations and the seizing of their assets, which was almost complete within five years. The monarch's headship of the Church of England went on in subsequent reigns to provide an enduring constitutional and legal basis upon which official ecclesiastical ideology could be (and frequently, suddenly, and radically was) changed at national level, from the top. However, it is a major (though widespread) misconception to see Henry as having begun to do this himself; he was not a Protestant in any doctrinal sense, nor did he tolerate Reformation ideas.[2]

It was in fact in the reign of Henry's son Edward VI (1547-53) that Reformation principles were first brought in and instituted; this was done under the aegis of two successive Lords Protector regent, since Edward himself was only ten years old when he came to the throne. But things then went into shuddering reverse under the even briefer rule of his half-sister Mary "the Catholic" (1553-58), who dedicated herself to the reintroduction of former ways, and persecuted Protestants. The trend towards reformation of the Church of England was only resumed (and was then resumed quickly) with the accession of the third half-sibling, Elizabeth I (1558-1603); although many initiatives taken in her time were emergency measures introduced *ad hoc*, in practice her long reign allowed for some stability, and the famous *Thirty-Nine Articles*, adopted in 1563, ultimately bedded themselves in as the *de facto* as well as the official doctrinal basis of distinctively Anglican ecclesiology.

When reading the book under review one has constantly to bear in mind the stage that national policy had reached at any particular time as, lurching from side to side in the manner just described, it constituted the context for, and necessarily exerted enormous influence upon, the words, actions and works of all of the people involved.

2.1 The revolving door

For many individuals who were influential at a level just below the national, the ideological flux manifested itself as a revolving door. Beginning in some high University or ecclesiastical position, such men (always men!) would find themselves abruptly committed to prison, only to be returned just as suddenly to the summit of power – and then to fall from it again, as the régime changed for

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[2] The title "Defender of the Faith' had been awarded to Henry by pope Leo X in 1521, and the king never abjured such central Roman theological tenets as transubstantiation (the belief that the eucharistic bread and wine actually change into the body and blood of Christ at the moment of consecration); indeed, as late as 1539, in his *Statute of the Six Articles*, Henry officially declared to be heretical any denial of that or of other specified doctrines. These doctrines were anathema to Reformed theologians.

the third time in a dozen years.[3] At this level, Dr Frost does provide the detail;[4] and it is against this background that he introduces, edits, translates, and discusses the fascinating SA, found in a single, apparently autograph copy appended to the better-known *Tregear Homilies* in British Library manuscript Add. 46397. But we first need to look at the latter (as Frost does, on pp. 31-39).

3. The *Tregear Homilies* (TH)

TH is "a translation into the Cornish language of a book of homilies issued by Edmund Bonner, bishop of London in the reign of Mary I" (p.4),[5] Frost reminds us that the priest responsible "is now known to have been the vicar of St Allen in Cornwall from 1544 to 1583".[6] He comments that the translation was "presumably … intended to support a Counter-Reformation programme of preaching, disputation or theological education in western Cornwall and is most likely to date from sometime between 1555 and 1558" (p.11). This analysis constitutes a key insight, as it shows that Mary's attempts to reverse the Reformation were by no means reliant on force alone: minds, hearts, and shared beliefs were appealed to, in a campaign of persuasion that was thought out nationally (as by Bonner) but applied locally and in detail (as in TH), even when this involved expedients such as working in the generally despised Cornish language.[7] Given the brevity of Mary's reign, for this programme to have been implemented as quickly and as thoroughly as it was shows enormous and flexible dedication on the part of its protagonists at every level.

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3 This is what happened to numerous anti-Reformation figures as Edward succeeded Henry, Mary succeeded Edward, and Elizabeth in turn succeeded Mary. But for some key clergy in the Reformed party, who by contrast were in high office under Edward and then deprived under Mary, the door did not revolve again; there was no way back for someone burnt at the stake.

4 Thus he outlines how, among academics, "John Young (1514-1580) … came before the Privy Council in 1551 for opposing Edward's reforms, but was rehabilitated under Mary, becoming Regius Professor at Cambridge. On the accession of Elizabeth, he was deprived and imprisoned successively in the Counter, the Marshalsea and Wisbech Castle, where he died" (p. 168, n. 74). Among clerics, "Thomas Watson (1513-1584) … imprisoned for his opposition under Edward VI but restored to favour under Mary I, … became Dean of Durham, then Bishop of Lincoln. Under Elizabeth I he was deprived, imprisoned and committed to Wisbech Castle" (p. 191, n. 163). Similar trajectories are outlined for many individuals in both categories.

5 Frost characterizes Bonner's initiative as as part of Mary's "programme to renew [Roman] Catholicism in England through worship, preaching and catechesis" (p. 4).

6 For this priest to have translated the *Homilies* and still to remain in post throughout the period indicated suggests, given the unpredictable turbulence described above, that he must have been very lucky, very blessed, very popular, or politically very skilful: to regard him as simply a compliant "vicar of Bray" would be unfair seeing that he was clearly not content merely to keep his head down.

7 As Frost remarks, perhaps "there was an element of counterbalance to Cranmer's lack of diplomacy towards Cornish-speakers at the time of the 1549 Rising, in the reign of Edward VI" (p. 11); see n. 10 below.

4. The purpose and significance of *Sacrament an Alter*

Despite being appended to TH, SA differs from that work in its author and date (and hence context), and in what it is talking about. The subject-matter of SA, all the way through, is the question of transubstantiation,[8] and the author one Thomas Stephyn. In the course of his formidable detective work in identifying who exactly Stephyn was, Frost is charmingly, interestingly, and unashamedly discursive;[9] but the upshot of his investigation is that "we can date the Cornish of SA as being written no earlier than 1576, and conceivably somewhat later" (p. 25). This means that, unlike the presumably Marian TH (see above), SH dates from well into Elizabeth's reign. It being a collection of arguments in favour of transubstantiation, this means that it was a subversive tract, as the pendulum of English national ideology had by now swung back to embrace Reformed ideas. So Stephyn was taking a risk in compiling it; the fact that he felt it worth doing so, *and in Cornish*, is of considerable significance since, unlike most of the authors we think of as responsible for the surviving post-medieval Cornish corpus, he must have been motivated by practical rather than primarily antiquarian concerns. In other words, there was a perceived spiritual or pastoral need in West Cornwall that, as late as the last quarter of the sixteenth century, could only be addressed through the language.[10]

5. Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* the surprising source of SA

Even more intriguing is the primary source upon which Stephyn closely based his compilation of SA. This source, of which SA is in fact a selective translation, is John Foxe's English-language *Actes and Monuments*; Frost skilfully pins down the edition used to that published in London in 1576 (which is how he establishes that as the earliest possible date for SA itself). What is striking about Stephyn's

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8 See n. 2 above; matters of theological doctrine, such as this, had quickly eclipsed the importance of the question of who was head of the Church of England, the latter being a dispute that tends retrospectively to be given much more weight than seems to have been accorded to it by either side once the reign of Henry was over.

9 Thus on p. 51 we read that, looking even "outside the diocese of Exeter [to which Cornwall unfortunately belonged; see below] …, a considerable number of Thomas Stephyns crop up. None of these are necessarily anything to do with the author of *Sacrament an Alter* … I will nonetheless summarize what we know of one or two of them" (which he does).

10 This observation further demonstrates (see n. 7 above) how tin-eared, as well as ideologically inconsistent with one of the principles of his own movement, Thomas Cranmer had been when, a generation (and two reigns) previously, he had counter-productively denied the Cornish the Anglican Prayer Book in their own tongue. The difference a more enlightened linguistic policy might have made is indicated by the contrasting Manx experience, on which see the "thought experiment" conducted below.

choice is that Foxe's work is itself an ardently Protestant composition, being none other than what came subsequently to be known as the famous *Book of Martyrs*. Foxe had centred this around "an account of the full-scale academic disputation conducted by theologians from both Oxford and Cambridge with the bishops Latimer, Ridley and Cranmer in April 1554" (p. 22). The process had evolved under queen Mary from debates into trials, then into show-trials, then into sentencing to burning; Foxe, as a supporter of the defendants, obviously felt it vitally important to "collate a narrative" of the proceedings, even though the latter had been "meant to demonstrate the victory of Catholicism over Protestantism",[11] presumably feeling that the (to him) outrageous result would speak for itself.[12] So Frost calls it "fascinating that Stephyn … attempted the difficult task of reversing the impact of Foxe's account again, by similar selectivity" (p. 22),[13] and "intriguing … to find a traditionally minded priest in the 1570s using a Protestant account of the Disputations to provide the spine of his *catena* of patristic proof texts of transubstantiation and the sacrifice of the Mass" (p. 68). Why should Stephyn have adopted this doubly oblique approach to his subject? "Foxe's work, from 1570 on, was supposed to be made available as a large, chained volume in every cathedral in the land and in a number of larger churches" (p. 23), so one factor may have been the purely practical one of ease of access to it; one does wonder also if its Protestant nature might usefully have camouflaged what Stephyn's real purpose was in translating it (after all, his reversal of Foxe's argumentation is only fully revealed once one realizes what he has left out). As for its (to Stephyn) uncongenial slant, in the *Actes and Monuments* record of the Disputations "there was a genuine aspiration towards accuracy and integrity and … although Foxe is often our only source, the fact that we can even attempt to reconstruct what might actually have happened says a great deal for him" (p. 64).

6. Dr Frost's theological analysis

Even apart from the edition of SA itself and all of the significance for Cornish Studies that it entails, this volume would be ground-breaking in its detailed

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11 It is worth noting that Frost's use (as here) of "Catholic" as the appropriate identifying label for the anti-Reformation party, though now used ubiquitously as convenient shorthand, is anachronistic and mildly tendentious: both sides saw themselves as the legitimate protagonists of Catholic truth, a consideration that was (and is) as fundamental to the self-identification of mainstream Protestants as it ever was to that of the pro-transubstantiation party. Less inoffensive is Frost's use of quotation marks when referring to Latimer, Ridley and Cranmer as "the Oxford 'martyrs'", as he does on p. 63.

12 In rhetorical terms a modern analogue to this approach might be the screenplays of some of the BBC's *Storyville* documentary *exposé*s: these are famously effective exactly because they consist exclusively of interviews with, and recordings of, key partisans of the very formation that is being critically examined.

13 "Selectivity within selectivity", as it were – with the slant reversed each time!

analysis of the theological argumentation involved.[14] By this I mean not only its treatment of the pro-transubstantiation discourse that Stephyn's carefully selective translation constitutes, but also of the content and background of the original disputations (to the extent that the latter can be apprehended through the filter imposed by Foxe), as well as of the manner in which these were conducted. Ever discursive but at the same time informative and constructive, Frost introduces his treatment by declaring (p. 20-21) that "it may be helpful to look at the context of other Eucharistic debates at the time and explain briefly how they were conducted". This is something of an understatement of what he then goes on to do: such debates largely consisted (on both sides) of extensive citation from early Christian patristic sources, and Frost informs us comprehensively about those as well. Thus in his invaluable and extraordinarily detailed "Commentary" (pp. 147-219), which is focused "on the theology and structure of SA" (p. 147), Frost provides micro-biographies of each of the Church Patriarchs cited by the disputants. When this extends even to St Augustine of Hippo, telling us that he "greatly influenced the development of western Christianity" (p. 150), it verges upon patronizing the reader; but in general it is extremely useful, for example in confirming that the famous Council of Nicaea of A.D. 325 (the first Ecumenical Council, of Nicene Creed fame) took place at İznik in modern Turkey and not at Nice in modern France (which had the same Latin name and whose own church had delegates at the Council, so confusion would be understandable); after all, particularly in a double-targeted work like this,[15] who can be sure what some readers may not be aware of?

6.1 Dr Frost's ecclesiology

All of that being said, and possibly stemming from a sense that Catholic teaching has adhered to the maxim *nihil novi nisi quod traditum est* ("Nothing new except what has been handed down") and therefore is essentially timeless, Dr Frost occasionally strikes a surprisingly anachronistic-sounding note. For example, on

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[14] The aspects cannot be separated within SA, and Frost makes no attempt to do so. The result, however, is that one needs to keep three bookmarks synchronized as one works through the edition: one moving through the "Commentary" (see below), one through the philological "Notes" (pp. 221-89), and one through the "Edition" itself (pp. 77-145). Furthermore, within each two-page spread that faces one upon opening the Edition section, four coordinated components need to be kept track of: a diplomatic transcript (about twenty lines at a time) of the Cornish-and-Latin MS (top left), Frost's corresponding critical text (bottom left), his corresponding English translation (bottom right), and – potentially confusingly, at top right – the English-and-Latin passage from Foxe of which the SA text is itself a translation.

[15] Frost is explicit that the "overall aim of this edition is … to provide the means of understanding *Sacrament an Alter* both for those who know Cornish (but have been put off by the theology) and for those who know theology (but have been put off by the Cornish)" (p. 15).

p. 190 he appears to be asserting rather than merely reporting the view that "the Church has always 'worshipped the flesh of Christ in the Eucharist'". On p. 213, trying to source a passage in which substance and accidents are referred to in connection with transubstantiation, he remarks that the terms are "found among Augustinian material, but not in this context". It is strange that Frost doesn't add that they would have remained alien to the context for a further nine hundred years, which is when these Aristotelian concepts were first yoked to the Eucharist.[16] Again, it seems odd for a historian to say that "Stephyn's … use of the Geneva Bible (and Foxe) for his annotations in TH hints at a world in which Catholic and Protestant clergy, arguments and sources are somewhat jumbled together" (p. 179). My point is that these categories were not, at the time, distinct; everyone would have agreed that there was just one, Catholic Church, containing on the one hand sound teaching and its proponents, and on the other hand unsound teaching (which was to be countered) and its proponents (who were to be argued with and, depending on the balance of power, brought into line or, failing that, excommunicated, but in any case neutralized as influencers); but it was recognized (and indeed hoped or feared, depending on the direction) that any individual might show tendencies one way or the other, possibly varying over time, as might their teachings. Reconciliation was always on the cards, and the notion of two (or more) Churches, with separate (that is, Catholic or Protestant) clergy, would have made no sense to anyone.[17]

In an appraisal of the overall tendency of the 1554 Disputations, Frost senses, particularly at one point with Ridley on the stand, "the possibility of a meaningful discussion, had both sides been more open" (p. 196). Unfortunately, "as it happens, Watson [the Marian Bishop of Lincoln][18] takes the debate in another direction". Nevertheless, the tenor of the final few extracts in Stephyn's selection could be seen as grounds for a possible rapprochement between the parties: Foxe's original English notes have the traditionalist Hugh Weston saying "By the presence of his flesh he [Christ] is not here. The Church hath hym not in flesh, but by beliefe" (p. 145) – which is about as compatible with the Reformers' view as they could reasonably have hoped. SA itself is fragmentary at the

16 Similarly we read on p. 205 of Latimer's argument that St Augustine's "understanding of [the Mass] must have been very different to the Catholic one"; however Latimer may have phrased it, it can hardly have been like that!

17 To be a bit discursive (but only a little more so than Frost is!), the changing situation during those turbulent years seems in fact to have resembled that artfully depicted in Rowling (2003) as pertaining at Hogwarts and in the Weasley family during the stealthy ideological coup and counter-coup within the Ministry of Magic: at no time does anyone suggest founding a rival school, all four contending Houses continue to exist within Hogwarts and, at a personal level, individuals lean one way or the other, or seek to find a middle way, or try just to get by and hope for better times.

18 See n. 4 above.

corresponding point and, as Frost remarks, we are "in the realms of conjecture for Stephyn's final words" (p. 219). It is therefore more as the devout former Principal of Holy Cross College and University Centre than as a purely academic historian that Frost imagines those final words as having affirmed Stephyn's faith in, specifically, "the sacrifice and sacrament of the altar".

7. Linguistic analysis: Code-switching

Turning to Frost's expert analysis of linguistic aspects of SA – a change of topic more extreme than is encountered in most scholarly books, and that few academic fields apart from Celtic Studies would be wide enough to accommodate – it is noteworthy that the term *code-switching*, the name for a concept of increasingly recognized significance over recent years,[19] appears not to be used. However, at least sometimes code-switching is surely what is going on (I would characterize the relevant passages as having a Cornish matrix within which the semantically key words are English); for example, at 64r25-28 in the MS we read *an quantite a'n oblation-ma ew sufficient … Whath eth ew gwrys satisfaction … accordyng the'n quantyte age devotion & not rag oll an payn* "the measure of this oblation is sufficient … Yet it becomes a satisfaction … according to the measure of their devotion & not for all the pain" (pp. 124-25). Or (although here the English words are somewhat assimilated to Cornish shapes) we have, at 65v13, *An Arluth a thisquethas an cruelte a Judas pan rug an Arluth Dew e rebukya, whath na ruk Judas e understandya: ef a tastyas kigg an Arluth Dew* "The Lord showed [= exposed] the cruelty of Judas when the Lord God rebuked him, yet Judas did not understand it: he tasted the Lord God's flesh" (pp. 134-35). On other occasions Stephyn retains one English phrase from Foxe so as to balance it with another, while translating the remainder of the words into Cornish; thus 59v16-17 gives us [*n*]*ot der* ("through") *faith only, mas e weth* ("but also") *in very deed* (p. 86). Frost says that Stephyn has here "drifted into using a number of English words … raising questions about the nature of his bilingualism" (p. 239) though surely, in this instance at least, it is a question of code-switching for rhetorical effect.

7.1 Frost's "General notes"

In the body of Frost's valuable "General [linguistic] notes" (pp. 222-33), he comments (on p. 224) on Stephyn's *oma* for an expected *ema* (3sg. present of **bos** "to be") at 63r23, and on the stressed vowel in his *a thoskas* "learned" at 63r15

[19] Early evidence of the growing level of interest in this within our field was the workshop on *Code-switching in the medieval classroom* that was held in Utrecht in May 2015, with proceedings subsequently published as Ó Flaithearta and Nooij (2018).

(*recte* 19), where a higher vowel than *o* would be expected. Frost adduces influence from the respective cognates *y mae* and *dysg-* in Welsh; but why the alleged influence would have had this particular effect is not explained, and the question of how it might have been brought to bear is not addressed.

On p. 227 he rightly reports as important the late and much lamented Albert Bock's finding that the reflexes of etymological /l/ and of etymological /ll/ are very rigorously kept apart in spelling in SA (namely by being represented with *l* and *ll/lh* respectively). The distinction is also found in other Late Cornish writings and, given how much variation there is in other orthographic features of these texts, their consistency on this point must reflect some living phonetic differentiation. The consensus seems to be that whatever distinguished the erstwhile geminate cannot have been pre-occlusion (namely a pronunciation of it as [tl] or [dl]); but I feel we should ask why not.[20] And while Frost's "General notes" do remark (at p. 228) upon Stephyn's frequent, sometimes almost perverse-seeming non-marking of mutation, the most extreme example of all, namely *an mam* for "the mother" at 59r37 (p. 84) and 59v8 (p. 86) alongside three occurrences of the expected *an vam*, is not explicitly adduced (though it is duly indexed in the comprehensive "Glossary" (pp. 297-318 at p. 310).

7.2 Frost's "Textual notes"

In the course of his detailed and erudite "Textual notes and apparatus" (pp. 233-89), in which Frost comments *seriatim* on specific linguistic points in order of their occurrence, we have on p. 280 a nice account of how the manuscript's *a feran* (for *aferan*, a late spelling at 66r17 of the word for Mass) was long misread as *a* plus *seran*,[21] the latter form being (mis)understood from the (over-interpreted) context as a Cornish word for a prayer for the dead. Apparently this item then "made its way into various dictionaries", being accorded an etymology from Latin **serenare** ("to free from gloom"). But the dictionaries are not specified (I don't find **seran** in any that I have consulted), and there is no indication that the word ever went on to be used in fresh writing; using the taxonomy developed in an earlier number of the present journal,[22] it may therefore be classified as a

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20 In the light of undisputed [bm] for original /mm/ and [dn] for /nn/, [tl] or [dl] for /ll/ would make sense phonetically and would fit structurally; and just such a set of realizations is attested in Manx. To propose that [tl] was the form that the original Cornish geminate sound had by now taken, despite continuing to be represented by the traditional spelling *ll*, does not seem unreasonable (Icelandic has witnessed just that development), while the occasional *lh* would not be a bad fit for [tl] either.

21 The *a* was presumably taken, given the context, as the English indefinite article rather than as a spelling of the Cornish definite article, attested though the latter phenomenon is.

22 Harvey (2019); the taxonomy has subsequently been adopted by Robertson (2022).

ghost that was successfully busted before it had a chance to become a poltergeist word.

On the complicated Latin etymology lying behind the second element of *deow habblys* "Maundy Thursday" at 66r25, discussed on pp. 281-82, see further Harvey and Power (2005), s.v. **capitulatio**. And on p. 285, discussing the *crig ge* "Believe thou!" of 66v10, Frost outlines the well-known (and hotly contested) problem of relating the varying spelling of the consonant that follows the vowel in that verb (and that occurs in numerous other items of Cornish vocabulary) to what must have been its evolving phonetic nature. What seems clear are the end-points: it began as /d/ (pronounced as such, as it still is in Welsh *cred-*) and finished as what Lhuyd wrote as *dzh* (presumably the sound in English *fudge*). At points in between, however, it was spelled with *s* (presumably voiced, as both its predecessor and its later reflex were); but does this imply that it had lost its original stop element, only to regain it later? Further work is needed on this.

7.3 Frost's linguistic reconstructions

What is unusual in a field dominated by essentially antiquarian philology is the editor's clear commitment to the life, in the present day, of the language that he is dealing with. This leads him to "fill in the blanks" in a manner that will be hailed as brave and commendable by those who see no conflict between scholarship (provided it is conducted rigorously), and the ideals of the Cornish revival movement; others, however, might potentially see it as foolhardy and pointless. An example may be found on p. 271, where Frost offers a 22-word reconstruction (I would call it "informed speculation", since it is based upon what Foxe says in English at the corresponding point and upon what would physically fit on the page) of a fragmentary passage of which, in fact, only the single word *rag* ("because, for") survives! Our editor is entirely frank about what he is doing; but those who would insist on a distinction would have to admit that the academic philologist has here become the language revivalist or revitalist. Again, on p. 138 a thirteen-word mantra is reconstructed from a passage in which only three of the words are complete (and only five appear at all). The basis for it is unclear; as it rhymes, I should have thought it worth pointing that out, and writing (and translating) it as the couplet(s) *[Bar]a ha gwyn dir ger[ryow Dew / Corf ha Gois Christ gwris e thew]* ("[Br]ead and wine, through the wor[ds of God, / Are made Christ's Body and his Blood]").

7.4 Reassessing the significance of Glasney

Until very recently the conventional wisdom was that the tragic 1548 dissolution of Glasney collegiate church at Penryn signalled the end of all hope that the

medieval tradition of Cornish-language literary production might continue into subsequent times in any kind of organized manner; the undeniably authoritative and influential institutional basis provided by the College until then was seen as having been quite simply a *sine qua non*. However, the need for at least some catechetical and pastoral provision through the language across wider West Cornwall had been recognized in pre-Reformation times: although the liturgy was in Latin, permission had been granted to teach the Apostle's Creed in Cornish "in certain parishes" (p. 170), and it has now become clear that, already by the time of the dissolution, "some of those seeking to preserve Cornish Catholic heritage through the medium of the language … were not at Glasney", even if they "were possibly influenced by a Glasney priest out in the parishes" (p. 61). As for the geographical area implied by this, Dr Frost speaks of the origins and zones of work of the activists as having spanned "northern Kerrier and eastern Penwith … although their area of operation extended beyond Glasney to Mylor, Truro, St Allen and Newlyn East" (p. 72) – quite a large district. So it is beginning to look as if the crucial factor in precipitating traditional Cornish into ultimately terminal decline may not, after all, have been primarily the loss of Glasney as an institutional base, but rather the fact that the network of individual influencers operating through the language came to find themselves on the wrong side of ecclesiastical history; if any one of a number of factors had been less unfavourable then, even without Glasney, the fate of Cornish might have been different.

7.5 Proposing a Manx comparison

Exploring further the lead given us by Dr Frost here, we have already noted that, as archbishop of Canterbury under Edward, Cranmer had squandered a potential opportunity to attract the Cornish-speaking community into the Reformed camp.[23] But let us conduct a "thought experiment" and imagine that Cornwall had been an episcopal see in its own right, rather than being ruled ecclesiastically from far-away Exeter.[24] In that case its successive bishops would presumably have been installed and/or deprived in accordance with the ideology of the monarch of the day, as happened elsewhere; but even so, whoever was the incumbent at any given point in the Tudor period might, even if only as a pragmatic response to the needs he perceived, have been in a position to take the initiative and provide his diocese with the vernacular materials required for the implementation of his agenda. A series of bishops doing this in succession, even if ideologically opposed to one another, might have made all the difference to the survival of the language. It seems not unreasonable to suggest this because,

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23 See above, nn. 7 and 10.

24 A situation not remedied until 1876, when the diocese of Truro was formed.

beginning only a generation later in another small and isolated Celtic-speaking community,[25] that is what did happen: between 1604 and 1610 the Prayer Book, including the psalms, was translated into Manx under bishop John Phillips, while subsequent sustained initiatives by bishops Thomas Wilson and Mark Hildesley ultimately saw not only the Prayer Book (in a fresh translation) brought to print in 1765, but the whole Bible itself a decade later, to the incalculable and lasting benefit of that diminutive part of Gaeldom. And in the Manx case, unlike the Cornish, the orthography had to be developed from scratch.[26]

What is more, the Manx example indicates that similar provision could in principle have been made in Cornish even in the absence of continued institutional underpinning from Glasney: between them, the clergy of the seventeen parishes in the Isle of Man proved to have the necessary skillset to do the job,[27] so there is no reason to suppose that a similarly-sized network of literate parochial clerics in Cornwall, like that actually identified by Frost, could not have achieved the same thing given the same degree of episcopal backing.

8. Conclusion: The enduring effectiveness of networks

Be all the above as it may, looking at the context in which Dr Frost's magisterial publication was produced, and the scholarly inputs to it that he graciously acknowledges, one is reminded of one of the aspects of the situation pertaining in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Mann, and at least potentially in Tudor Cornwall, to which attention has just been drawn: namely just how much of real worth can, in principle, be achieved by a small network of committed people, even in the absence of a formal institutional framework. In the case of the present book itself one is struck by the amount of contributory work, of the highest scholarly standard but often unpublished, that was produced or generously contributed by individuals generally known to Celticists primarily in their capacity as protagonists in the language-revival movement (and hence undervalued by some). Examples are the work of Benjamin Bruch (p. 10, n. 31 and p. 78) and, earlier, the transcription of TH jointly undertaken by Robert Morton Nance and A.S.D. Smith.[28] Oliver Padel and Nicholas Williams (p. 78)

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25 The Manx population has probably never been more than a sixth that of Cornwall, though of course a much higher proportion of it was Celtic-speaking throughout the period under discussion.

26 On this disadvantage (and for the dates) see Lewin (2020). On the other hand the three Island bishops did hold in common (and maintain) a clearly *Thirty-Nine Articles*-based Anglican ideology (see above), a continuity of agenda that must have helped.

27 Lewin (2020) at 40-41.

28 As Dr Frost points out, had this "ever been published in full, it would have advanced the study of Tregear's work (and the reputation of Nance) considerably" (p. 12); "the value of this body of meticulous scholarship has been insufficiently appreciated" (p. 12, n. 38).

were both already well known for their scholarship in Cornish; but the outstanding contribution made by Andrew Hawke (p. 12) will come as news to some, as he is generally known instead for directing the ongoing second edition of the Welsh national dictionary *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*. Similar observations go for others: provided they care enough, individuals can (and do) quietly produce work on and in Cornish of a calibre comparable with the best in the wider Celtic Studies field, but their efforts often "fly under the radar". The *1,000 Years of Cornish* series, in which Daveth Frost's volume is the first to appear, will make it impossible to remain genuinely unaware of these contributions and of their impressively high quality.

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REVIEW

Evans-Jones, Gareth. 2022. *"Mae'r Beibl o'n tu": Ymatebion crefyddol y Cymry yn America i gaethwasiaeth (1838-1868).* Cardiff: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru. ["The Bible's on our side": religious responses of Welsh people in America to slavery (1838-1868)]

Review by RICHARD CLEAVES (https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1377-8319), MA (Oxford), PhD (University of Wales and University of Gloucestershire).

It is only recently that the involvement of the people of Wales in slavery and the trans-Atlantic slave trade has come to the fore. In what has become a standard history of Wales, John Davies has no entry for slavery in the index and makes only passing mention of the dependence of the Penrhyn slate industry on Jamaican slave plantations and of the export of Welsh woollen flannel for the clothing of enslaved people in America (Davies 2007a: 758, 317, 318, 2007b: 683, 298, 299). Elin Jones, on the other hand, devotes two fully illustrated pages to the Welsh involvement in the trade and ownership of enslaved people in her new and very accessible history of Wales. In one simple but comprehensive map she identifies the routes taken by handloom weavers in the export of flannel to American slave plantations, the ports that were used for the import of cotton and tobacco from those same plantations, and the ship-yards where Welsh copper was used in building copper-bottomed ships for transporting enslaved people. The map also identifies the homes of 46 families who were compensated as former owners of enslaved people in 1833 (Jones 2021a: 116-117, 2021b: 116-117).

This in part is because the full story of Britain's slave owners has only recently been told. A full and detailed record was kept of the £20 million the British state borrowed to enable compensation to be paid to each owner of every enslaved person at the abolition of slavery in Britain in 1834. It was, however, kept secret in the state archives until publication began in 2007 in a comprehensive and searchable database now maintained by the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery (Legacies of British Slavery 2023). The total value in today's money is usually put at £16-17 billion; however, as a government loan a more accurate sum would be £97 billion, calculated as a proportion of Britain's gross domestic product (Measuring Worth – Relative Worth Comparators and Data Sets 2023). The enormity of the loan explains why it was not fully paid off by the

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British Government until 2015 (Olusoga 2018). Increasing awareness has led to the acknowledgment of complicity by individuals (Lashmar and Smith 2023; France-Presse 2023) and institutions from the Guardian (Olusoga 2023) to the Bank of England (Slavery & the Bank 2023). Following the murder of George Floyd, controversy ensued concerning the inappropriate commemoration of slave owners such and the Welsh Senedd undertook an audit of people and places associated with slavery in Wales (Wakelin 2021).

In this context Gareth Evans-Jones' study of religious responses to slavery among Welsh people in America in the mid nineteenth century is timely (Evans-Jones 2022). Its strength lies in the detail of its narrow focus. Given that more than 600 Welsh chapels were built in America in the nineteenth century, Evans-Jones focuses on the Welsh speakers who took with them from Wales their nonconformist beliefs and practices. The proliferation of Welsh language newspapers, periodicals and pamphlets in what he describes as the golden age of Welsh language publishing in America, 1838 to 1868, provides a rich resource as the basis of this study. While taking into account the full range of publications, Evans-Jones pays particular attention to three denominational publications: the Calvinistic Methodist *Y Cyfaill o'r Hen Wlad,* the Friend from the Old Country, first published in 1838; the Congregationalists' *Y Cenhadwr Americanaidd*, The American Messenger, 1840; the Baptists' *Y Seren Orllewinol*, The Western Star, 1844. He also draws on three more broadly-based publications: *Y Dyngarwr*, the Philanthropist, 1844-1845; what was to become the main weekly Welsh language newspaper, *Y Drych*, the Mirror, 1850; and the more academic publication with contributions from Wales and America, *Y Traethodydd yn America*, 1857.

The detail of Evans-Jones' research opens a window not only on to the fierce debates on slavery that developed in the 1840s and 1850s and culminated in the American Civil War (1861-1865), but also on to ordinary Welsh speaking people as they made a new home for themselves in America. In the Introduction he explores the factors that pushed them away from Wales: economic hardship; industrialisation; the imposition of the church tithe by the established Church of England; the attempted suppression of the Welsh language in the context of the Blue Books and the Welsh Not (Johnson et al. 1847). And he considers all that pulled them towards America: the freedom to own property, practise their Christian faith, and use their own language, albeit, as Evans-Jones notes in an aside, at the expense of the native American people. An overview of slavery in America in the remainder of the Introduction sets the scene for an exploration of the response of Welsh people as they encountered slavery first-hand. Evans-Jones tells of the acceptance of slavery at the time of the Declaration of Independence and its growth in response to the demand for cotton, sugar and tobacco; he tells of the Missouri Compromise of 1820 banning slavery to the north of the 36th parallel, of Nat Turner's bloody revolt of 1831, and the growth of the abolitionist

movement from the 1830s on. He tells of John C. Calhoun's defence of slavery as 'a positive good' in 1837, of the fugitive slave legislation of 1850 demanding throughout the United States the return of a runaway slave to their master, and of the Supreme Court judgment in 1857 preventing African Americans from becoming citizens. By the time Abraham Lincoln was elected in 1861, the population of African Americans was 4,441,830, of whom 3,953,760 were enslaved people. The ensuing separation of the southern states from the north led to the Civil War, 1861-1865. Abraham Lincoln's Proclamation of Emancipation on 1 January 1863, led eventually to Congress passing the thirteenth amendment in 1865 making slavery illegal. Not only is the period from 1838 to 1868 the golden age of Welsh language publishing in America, but it is also the period which culminates in the abolition of slavery and the re-building of America after the Civil War.

One of the many tragic features of that bitter civil war was, as Abraham Lincoln observed in his second Inaugural Address, the fact that both sides prayed to the same God and read from the same Bible. It is that issue that Evans-Jones addresses in the bulk of his book. Although the quotation he uses as the title of the book, 'The Bible is on our side' is taken from an opponent of slavery (p. 210), it is a claim that was made on both sides of the argument. He turns first to three passages from the Old Testament and then to key passages in the New Testament that figured large in the columns of the Welsh language periodicals as Welsh people grappled with their response to slavery. He finally takes the Fugitive Slave legislation of 1854 and explores the way the passages explored earlier in the book are used in context of debates surrounding that legislation. The book as a whole is a study of the reception of biblical texts and serves as a reminder to people engaged in modern debates over issues such as creation and sexuality that there are moments in history when the way in which biblical texts have been understood changes significantly. Evans-Jones succeeds in plotting how that paradigm shift took place in the context of the response Welsh Christians made when they encountered for themselves the enslavement of fellow human beings and all that implied for the practice of their Christian faith. Throughout, Evans-Jones succeeds in producing an engaging narrative which is supported by detailed end-notes and an argument that is clearly summarised in concluding sections to each chapter.

In chapter 1, Evans-Jones considers the narrative in Genesis 9:18-27, and especially Noah's curse of his youngest son, Ham, the father of Canaan. He first considers a range of modern interpretations of the passage, including those who regard it as an aetiological origin story accounting for the subjugation of Canaan and those who see it as offering an insight into the all-important honour code of the Middle East. He then goes on to track its interpretation by early Christian and Rabbinic Jewish commentators. By the sixteenth century Evans-Jones suggests

three elements of interpretation have become entrenched even though they have no basis in the text itself: that people who are black can be enslaved as black skin is the result of the curse; that Africans embody this accursed characteristic through over-indulgence in sex; that Africans were, therefore, brutish, deserving of enslavement and in need of the Gospel. This understanding of the curse of Ham became widespread among European colonialists, was a significant contributory factor to the development of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and in America came to be regarded as the ideological cornerstone for the justification of black slavery.

Contributors to the Welsh language periodicals tend for the most part to reject this interpretation, argues Evans-Jones. In the writings he surveys, the argument is frequently made that the curse of Ham has nothing to do with slavery, let alone the enslavement of African people. A detailed analysis of a debate between one calling himself 'Tudur' and another, 'Eos Glan Twrch' (the bardic name of John Edwards), however, is a reminder that among Welsh people there were those on both sides of the argument who claimed the support of the Bible. Tudur argued that the Bible's acceptance of slavery and its inclusion of laws governing the right treatment of slaves justified slavery in modern America, as long as slaves were treated well. Eos Glan Twrch, on the other hand, argued that slavery was itself sinful and an affront against other human beings. Tudur, Evans-Jones observes, was a rare exception: most contributions to the Welsh language periodicals were anti-slavery and did not give any credence to the connection between the curse of Noah and American slavery. They had one distinctive contribution to make. Welsh emigrants to America took with them the interest in ancient Welsh traditions that was sweeping Wales itself. Among those traditions was one that could be traced back to the ninth century identifying the Welsh as descendants of Gomer, the son of Ham's brother Japheth. Thomas E. Hughes, writing to *Y Cyfaill o'r Hen Wlad* in March 1869 was not untypical in arguing that the Welsh, as descendants of Gomer, were related to Africans as descendants of Ham. It was as if they were arguing that as members of the one human family, they should treat everyone equally. Some Welsh Americans went further, not least in a poetic drama, *The Treachery of the Blue Books*, to suggest that the freedom they sought in fleeing the tyranny of the commissioners as they endeavoured to suppress Welsh identity, was the freedom enslaved Africans also sought.

In their campaign against slavery, the Jubilee of Leviticus 25 became one of the key texts often cited by Welsh abolitionists in America. How different were the provisions for slavery in ancient biblical times from the treatment of enslaved Africans in America. The freedom envisaged in the Jubilee year, many argued, was a freedom that should be granted to enslaved people in America. In this second chapter, Evans-Jones focuses also on millenarian thinking among many contributors to the Welsh language periodicals: the abolition of slavery and the freedom of the slaves would pave the way for the coming of the millennium.

Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of 1 January 1863 was published in Y Cenhadwr Americanaidd under the headline, *Year of the Jubilee: Proclamation of Freedom for Three Million Slaves*. Evans-Jones traces the way the imagery of The Day of Jubilee when the chains of slavery are broken appears in many a poem and hymn, citing the winning poem in the Utica Eisteddfod of 1 January 1868 by T. B. Morris as it uses exactly that imagery in celebrating President Lincoln's Proclamation, Freeing the Slaves.

In the third chapter Evans-Jones examines the way the exile in Babylon was regarded by contributors to the Welsh language periodicals in America as a historical event and also as a concept analogous to the contemporary situation in the United States. Comparing the deportation of the Jews to Babylon with the deportation of Africans to America, Welsh writers tended to see an even greater degree of oppression in the contemporary American situation. In both the biblical exile and the contemporary enslavement of African people individuals were taken from their mother country and transplanted into a new land with a very different language and culture. That led Welsh people to support pioneering candidates politically who sought freedom for Africans in exile. Using the Biblical theme of exile enabled them to combine a number of discourses about slavery in a way that pricked the conscience of the readers.

Turning to the New Testament and the teaching of Jesus in chapter four, Evans-Jones sets out the way contributors to Welsh language periodicals adopted and adapted a strategy used widely among English speaking abolitionists in America. English speaking Americans had developed a new hermeneutic in reading the Bible less literally. Recognising that a slave society is assumed in the Gospel narratives of Jesus and regulated in Paul's letters, abolitionists argued that there was an over-riding principle of brotherhood and equality in the New Testament which exposed the immorality of enslaving people for profit and for cheap labour. Whilst adopting this shift from interpreting the Bible literally to a focus on the 'spirit of the gospel', Welsh abolitionists in America continued to use specific texts and passages from the Bible to support their cause. Hymn-writers spoke of the way enslaved people were the recipients of the grace of the gospel and deserving of bodily and spiritual freedom. Foremost among the texts to which they appealed was the Golden Rule in Matthew 7:12: 'In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets'. Contributors to *Y Dyngarwr*, the Philanthropist, invited Welsh people to imagine what it would be like if their brother or sister were enslaved, sold on and exposed to sexual abuse at the hands of their masters. That was, argued Owen Jones of Philadelphia, a complete contradiction of the Golden Rule. Coupled with the Golden Rule was the command to love one's neighbour. One of the leading Welsh abolitionists, Robert Everett, argued that 'freedom is the right of every man (sic) of every colour, language and nation, through the divine gift'. His emphasis on

equality related to another text popular among those opposed to slavery, Acts 17:26 speaks of God creating the whole world and all creatures. Writing in *Y Cenhadwr Americanaidd* in January 1843 Everett asked what Welsh people could do. His answer was clear: they should publicise the anti-slavery standpoint and campaign to reject prejudice against Africans on the grounds of race and colour. He made a special appeal to ministers to support the cause and establish anti-slavery societies as part of a mass movement in which unity is strength. His challenge was to compose hymns on freedom just as there were hymns on temperance.

Chapter five considers the response made by contributors to the Welsh language periodicals to one specific piece of legislation, the Fugitive Slave Law passed on 18 September 1850. This decreed that throughout the United States, in the North as well as in the South, runaway slaves when found must be returned to their master. This led to the development of the 'underground railway' as runaway slaves were helped to find a way to freedom in Canada. Harriett Beecher Stowe's campaigning novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Stowe 1981), highlights the way those defending and those opposing slavery both appealed to the Bible. It played a key part in the resistance to the Fugitive Slave Law and the success of the abolitionists. Evans-Jones details seven Welsh translations that appeared within a couple of years, including one by Robert Everett with a personal endorsement by Harriet Beecher Stowe (Everett 1854). Drawing on Biblical texts, contributors to the Welsh periodicals likened Canada to Canaan and the promised land of liberty sought by the erstwhile Hebrew slaves in Egypt. The express prohibition of the return of the runaway slave in Deuteronomy 23:15-16 became a cornerstone of the abolitionist reading of the Bible. In a sermon reported in *Seren Cymru* on 18 September 1860, Edward Matthews declared forcibly that the religion of Moses was an anti-slavery religion and spoke scathingly of the Fugitive Slave Law, describing it as unreasonable, cruel, unscriptural, contrary to the constitution of the United States, and a law that could not be obeyed as a higher power forbade it. This last point had been made at a meeting in Carmel Chapel, Pittsburgh only months after the legislation had been passed. Appealing to Acts 5:29, those present agreed that wherever a law contradicts the word of God or one's conscience, one is obliged to go to prison or even to death rather than to obey it. Evans-Jones argues that the frequent use of this text in this way suggests that Welsh people were among the most radical in the anti-slavery movement.

In his carefully argued and thoroughly referenced book Gareth Evans-Jones has opened up the little-explored world of Welsh-language periodicals in Wales and shone a light on the involvement of Welsh-speaking people in the most pressing issue of mid nineteenth century America. He challenges those in any context today who maintain that the Bible has always meant one thing, by

demonstrating how differently texts to do with slavery have been interpreted in the last 2000 years. In a final concluding chapter he invites his readers to reflect on the response made by Welsh people to modern slavery. Evans-Jones takes issue with the likes of Hector Avalos who argues that 'Biblical and Christian ethics were not a major factor in explaining the triumph of abolitionism between 1775 and 1863 or in any other period'. (Avalos 2011: 285) In spite of the fact that the Bible was used to justify both sides of the argument, Evans-Jones is clear: 'there can be no doubt that the Bible, Christian ethics and, indeed, the Nonconformist culture were significant for the Welsh people of America as they responded to contemporary slavery'. With a few exceptions, the majority were opposed to slavery and convinced that the Bible truly was 'on their side'.

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